

## South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Employment and Staffing Committee held on  
Tuesday, 2 May 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Sally Ann Hart – Chair  
Councillor Anna Bradnam – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Sunita Hansraj  
Richard Stobart

Mark Howell  
John Williams

Officers: Patrick Adams  
Helen Cornwell  
Jeff Membery

Senior Democratic Services Officer  
HR Business Partner  
Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate  
Services  
Chief Executive

Liz Watts

Councillor Bridget Smith was in attendance, by invitation.

Councillor Cllr Daniel Lentell was in attendance remotely, by invitation.

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received Councillor William Jackson-Wood.

Councillor Anna Bradnam was elected unopposed as Vice Chair for the meeting.

### 2. Declarations of Interest

None.

### 3. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the penultimate sentence of the main paragraph of minute 5 to read "... with workers in the waste depot making up a large proportion of lower quartile staff."

### 4. Public Question

Mr Daniel Fulton congratulated the Chief Executive on her PhD regarding the working of a four-day week but he asked whether this information should have been shared publicly and he questioned why it had been kept secret. The Chair stated that this question differed from the statement provided and that Mr Fulton would receive a written answer.

### 5. Results of the Four-Day Week Trial and Next Steps

Councillor John Williams presented this report on the results of the four-day week trial, which proposed that the Committee recommended that Cabinet agree

to extend the trial up to March 2024. He stated that the trial demonstrated that a four-day week could assist the Council in the recruitment and retention of staff, which would reduce the cost of agency staff. He reported that there had been no decline in performance due to the four-day week. He corrected a recent report in the press by stating that the Council would remain open for five days a week.

The Chief Executive thanked the Bennett Institute for Public Policy for their extensive evaluation of the Council's performance during the four-day week trial.

Councillor Mark Howell stated that it was not unusual for senior officers to undertake post-graduate courses on their own time and then apply the knowledge they obtained from those studies to their work for the Council. He concluded that the Committee should question members of the Cabinet on the Council's proposed policies.

Councillor Daniel Lentell asked if the fact that the Chief Executive was undertaking a PhD was potentially withheld from Members, the public and officers and whether the Committee had been aware of it. Councillor Lentell also asked if a political decision had been taken to decide not to disclose the Chief Executive's PhD to the public and if so whether the Committee would support an investigation into that decision. Councillor Lentell was promised a written response to his questions.

#### **Minor amendment – cost of agency staff**

The Committee noted that the number "£2,065.000" for the annual cost of agency staff in paragraph 12 of the report should be "£2,065,000". Jeff Membery explained that the Council was competing with other authorities and the private sector in the recruitment of officers in posts that were hard to fill, hence the high cost of agency staff. It was hoped that by retaining staff through the four-day week, these costs would be reduced.

#### **Responding to Members' queries**

Jeff Membery stated that there was no specific performance indicator for responding to queries from Members, beyond the general expectation that either an answer would be provided, or an explanation why this was not possible, within 48 hours. He encouraged members to use the online form, as this would allow questions to be tracked.

#### **Assessing impact of the trial**

Nina Jorden, from the Bennett Institute for Public Policy, explained that they had used the Council's Key Performance Indicators to assess the authority's performance during the trial period. She suggested that staff could be trained on how to make better use of digital tools to improve their productivity. It was noted that assessing the productivity of staff, if the trial period was extended, would require input from managers and was not a straight forward task.

#### **Developing teams**

Jeff Membery explained that a toolkit was being produced for managers to assist them in leading their teams. It was noted that all teams were being encouraged to meet up at least once every two weeks.

**Waste Service**

Councillor Mark Howell expressed concern that the report on the Shared Waste Service had not been included in the agenda. He concluded that he could not vote on the proposed recommendation to Cabinet without this information. The Chief Executive explained that the decision had been taken to send the report on the Waste Service, which included a review of the growth of the service, to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. The report to this Committee was on the Four-Day week desk-based trial and Cabinet would consider both reports.

Jeff Membery explained that the proposal was to trial a four-way week in the waste service which would require officers to work an extra half hour each day.

The Chair stated that there were no officers from the Waste Service present and the Committee would continue its discussion on the four-day week trial.

A vote was taken and, with the exception of Councillor Mark Howell who did not vote, all members of the Committee

**Agreed** to recommend that Cabinet:

- A) Approves 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) Notes 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 are established in order to provide Cambridge City Council with appropriate oversight arrangements regarding the Shared Planning Service.
- C) Approves 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.

**6. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 28 June 2023 at 2 pm.

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**The Meeting ended at 2.50 p.m.**

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