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**South
Cambridgeshire**
District Council

Minister Lee Rowley MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Email: cllr.bridgetsmith@scambs.gov.uk

1 July 2023

Dear Minister Rowley

I was surprised to receive your letter regarding the Council's trial of a four-day week and would like to request a meeting with Ministers to discuss this matter.

South Cambridgeshire has struggled for many years to recruit and retain staff. It is a very expensive place to live, and the job market is incredibly buoyant. Although the Council had implemented several measures to address this issue, last year we could only recruit to 80% of our vacancies, and in one quarter, only 50%. The problem is even worse when considering high skill areas such as Planning. The Council was regularly losing well trained employees to the private sector. This was the primary reason that the Council decided to trial a four-day week for all desk-based colleagues, between January and March 2023.

The independently assessed evidence of the initial three-month trial was presented to our Cabinet in May. Key Performance Indicators from across the Council were analysed by a research team at Cambridge University's Bennett Institute for Public Policy. They said that performance was maintained at the level shortly before the trial, while some areas of performance data saw significant improvement compared to recent data. They also said there were no serious outliers that require concern.



Prior to the four-day week trial, the Council was carrying a £2 million agency staff bill to cover 23 permanent roles we were finding it hard to recruit to. Most of these posts are in the Planning Service where an agency worker (including fees) costs approximately twice the amount a permanent employee costs. Four roles have been recruited to during the trial which has reduced the annual bill by £300,000. There are wider non-financial savings associated with a reduction in agency staff – especially in services like Planning where consistency of staff is vital to the smooth processing of planning applications. As time goes on it is becoming increasingly clear that recruitment has been positively affected, both in terms of the quality and number of applicants, and the consequent success in filling vacant posts.

We continue to improve the council's ability to provide high quality, consistent, resilient services, and save taxpayer money.

Please find through this link the evidence we considered at our Cabinet meeting on 15 May when we agreed to extend the trial to the end of March 2024 – [4dw to May 2023 Cabinet.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#).

I look forward to hearing from you and the opportunity to meet to discuss this matter more fully.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bridget Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Cllr Bridget Smith
Leader, South Cambridgeshire District Council