

Plans for Council's four-day week public consultation outlined

5 months ago



Plans for how people will be able to share their views on [South Cambridgeshire District Council's](#) services during a [trial of a four-day week](#) have been published.

A report to be discussed at the Council's [Scrutiny and Overview Committee](#) next week sets out the proposals for an eight-week public consultation. Subject to final sign-off, there will be a full public consultation that anyone, anywhere can respond to – starting at 9am on Monday 27 January. The planned consultation would then run for eight weeks, closing at 11.59pm on Sunday 23 March.

Given South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City councils share some key services – Greater Cambridge Shared Planning and Greater Cambridge Shared Waste – residents of Cambridge city will be encouraged to comment on their experiences of using these services.

The information gathered during the consultation will help District Councillors decide on the next steps for the four-day week at the Council.

The consultation has been set-up so that residents can share their views on how they have found Council services since January 2023 – when a trial of a four-day week began.

The Council announced plans to trial a four-day week – where people deliver 100% of their work, in around 80% of their hours, for 100% of their pay – to help address acute recruitment and retention issues.

Following a detailed and independent review of an initial three-month trial, the trial was extended for a further year and the Council has continued to work in this way as further information was awaited from Government.

During the Local Government Finance Settlement consultation for 2024/25, which was published in December 2023, the previous Government consulted on the potential of using financial levers, to come into force from April 2025, to discourage councils from adopting four-day weeks. Until there was more

clarity on this, Cabinet members considered it not feasible for the Council to carry out a meaningful consultation and decide on next steps.

The new Government's Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26, which was published on 18 December last year, made no mention of any financial levers that were threatened by the previous Government. This means that the Council is now able to consult.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr John Williams, said: "We have always made it very clear that we planned to give residents, businesses, parish and town councils and community groups the chance to share their views with us, on the impact on services they've received during our four-day week arrangements. We have not been able to do that up to this point because of threats made by the previous Government. With those threats lifted, we are now able to begin this process. Our approach is designed to ensure those who have used our services during the four-day week arrangements can quickly and easily share their views – though anyone, anywhere will be welcome to submit comments."

Cllr Mike Davey, Leader of Cambridge City Council, said: "We have supported the four-day week trial from the start, as South Cambridgeshire District Council works to find innovative solutions to the recruitment and retention challenges that are facing councils across the UK, with a knock-on impact on the cost of delivering services. We've always said that the most important factor for us is ensuring that services for residents continue to be delivered reliably and to a high standard, and we have been keeping a close eye on this throughout. It's right that residents are also invited to feedback on their experiences of Council services during the trial, and we'll be making sure that the consultation is well publicised to Cambridge residents once it's live, to ensure our residents voices are heard."

The idea of the four-day week at the Council is to help attract and keep talented colleagues in an incredibly competitive local employment market. It is also to help improve services by filling vacant posts permanently, rather than relying on more expensive agency staff. Regularly changing staff, or using agency staff to cover posts, is both costly and disruptive to services for residents.

Last summer, an [independent report by two universities](#) into the Council's performance during its four-day week trial was published. Of 24 key performance indicators monitored by the Council, analysis by the Universities of Cambridge and Salford found 22 improved or remained the same. The areas found to have improved included percentage of calls to the Council's Contact Centre answered, average number of weeks to determine householder planning applications and average number of days to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support changes.

There was also a financial assessment of the trial, which outlined a known full year cost saving of £371,500. This was mainly due to permanently filling 10 posts that were previously identified as 'hard to fill'. The financial saving reduced the Council's budget overspend because of not needing more expensive agency alternatives to fill the 10 posts.

The Council's opening hours have been maintained so it has been open for business just as it was before the trial – with longer opening hours on Wednesdays too.