

## Appendix I

### Comments and response to the consultation

| <b>Question: <i>“Please share your comments on the proposed change to working hours</i>”</b> |            |  |
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| <b>Theme</b>   | <b>No.</b> | <b>Nature</b>  |
| Cost of living/Financial impact/Prefer Pay rise  | 54         | <p>Of the 119 comments received, 54 respondents cited the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and financial concerns as a reason for their negative/mixed response. In summary, responses received under this theme raise <i>“significant concern at the thought of no pay rise this year given the large rise in inflation and the cost-of-living crisis that has ensued as a result”</i>.</p> <p>Responses categorised under this theme suggest that many employees are already struggling with the <i>“significant increase in bills/mortgage/rent/food/utilities etc”</i> and therefore staff are relying on a Pay Award in April in order to assist with this. Several respondents state that they will need to take on a 2<sup>nd</sup> job to supplement their income if bills continue to rise and there is no Pay Award given. Several staff also claim that the <i>“thought of not having a pay award to help towards these increased costs is causing them stress and anxiety.”</i></p> <p>Staff commented that the proposed changes to the working hours have been <i>“dressed up as an 8% pay rise”</i> however in real monetary terms, employees are concerned that they will see no benefit of this in their take home pay and that the <i>“3 hours per week social time does not help to pay the dramatic cost of living”</i>. It is stated that the <i>“reality is that it’s not an 8% pay rise but a small hourly rate uplift and whilst working 3 hours less, we are no better off financially, in fact worse off given the current standard of living crisis”</i>.</p> <p>There was a comment received suggesting the Council should pay a <i>“Cost-of-Living award to match inflation instead of paying staff their incremental annual rise as this is an additional bonus”</i>. In reply to this specific point, it must be noted that the annual increments payable in October for those not at the top of their grade, are contractual payments as set out in employee’s terms &amp; conditions, they are not discretionary bonuses which can just be stopped.</p> |

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|                     |    | <p>There were a couple of responses which acknowledged that some other employers are also not able to match the Pay Award in line with inflation, but suggestions were made about <i>“the possibility of a one-off payment to help with the Cost-of-living crisis”</i>.</p> <p>In summary, comments received under this theme are all concerned that the <i>“34 hour week with no pay rise, does not help staff keep up with the increasingly high cost of living”</i> and may cause some <i>“financial hardship”</i> They also believe that the 3 hour reduction makes it difficult for staff to be able to get a secondary part time job elsewhere to increase their income, which may have been viable had the Council opted to do a 4 day working week.</p> <p>Analysis of the comments under this theme, have shown correlation between the lower grades and a negative response regarding the cost of living and a preference for a Pay Award.</p> <p><b>In response to the concerns over the cost-of-living crisis, an amendment has been put into the budget proposals which recommends that staff on grade 5 and below are paid a one-off payment of £1,000 pro rata. This is equivalent of 4-5% of Grade 2-3 salaries and 3-4% of Grade 4-5 salaries. This will be made in addition to increments (where they are due)</b></p> |
| Workload/<br>Stress | 56 | <p>Almost half the comments received in response to the consultation cite concern about workloads and the viability of being able to carry out their current role in 34 hours per week.</p> <p>Many respondents state that they, and their department, are already <i>“overworked and understaffed”</i> and they feel there is a risk that 37 hours’ worth of work would be expected to be done in just 34 hours. They feel currently there is no way to reduce the number of hours they are working due to the large demand on their service, and many people already working in excess of 37 to cope with current workloads.</p> <p>Lots of comments received state that whilst they are engaging with their managers on what work can stop/be done differently etc, there is a general feeling that services have already</p>   |

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|  | <p>been streamlined to the maximum and that if there was work that could just be stopped, it would have been done already as staff have already been working to their limits.</p> <p>It can be noted that even some of the respondents who are more positive regarding the reduction in working hours, caveated their response with a concern about workloads not reducing in line with the reduction in hours which could have a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing.</p> <p>In summary, comments received under this theme express that many departments are already working beyond capacity and are experiencing staff shortages and it is felt that reducing the weekly hours could be untenable resulting in more pressure on staff/higher staff turnover.</p> <p><b>In response to the concerns raised regarding workloads and how these will be managed in the shorter working week; EMT are continuing to work with Heads of Service to identify which areas of work can cease or be modified to take account of the lesser weekly working hours. It is acknowledged that the reduction in working hours needs to be supported by a real change in workloads or processes to ensure that staff are not continuing to do the same level of work in less time and Heads of Service are working with their teams to identify where this can be achieved.</b></p> <p><b>There is a commitment by EMT to continually review the levels of work and an assurance is made that “pinch points” will be managed in line with Council policies, as they are now; for example, Elections, Closure of Accounts etc. EMT and Heads of Service are committed to regular monitoring and review of the situation to ensure that mitigation is considered where there is an unacceptable impact on workloads and/or statutory deadlines cannot be delivered.</b></p> <p><b>To mitigate the implications of the reduced hours and impact to service delivery, corporate service standards will be amended to reflect that tasks will take longer following the reduction. EMT and Heads of Service will work together to ensure that</b></p> |
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|                        |    | <p><b>Members, and the Public, are fully informed of the new service standards for each department and clear communications of any changes will be published.</b></p> <p><b>In addition, the council is developing a corporate transformation programme and service areas are continuing to look at ways to reduce workload, be more efficient and do things differently.</b></p> <p><b>With any change process, there will be things that will come up that were not foreseen even with the work to assess impact. It is essential that there is regular monitoring and review and action put in place to address issues. It will be compulsory to include a discussion at monthly 121s with all staff and team meetings. EMT will also receive a quarterly implementation report.</b></p>   |
| Flexibility over hours | 23 | <p>Of the total comments received, 23 respondents raised concern that mandating the Friday afternoon closure appears unnecessarily rigid and inconsistent with the flexible or agile way that we aspire to work.</p> <p>There are multiple comments to suggest that staff would prefer to work 4 longer days, or to pick the day they finish earlier, as a Friday may not suit everyone.</p> <p>In summary, responses under this theme suggest that it would be useful to allow some flexibility around which day staff chose to finish early, in agreement with their managers. They suggest there could be an understanding that Swale House and the phonelines will still close at 1:30pm on a Friday, so if staff chose to work on a Friday afternoon then they would need to work from home.</p> <p><b>In response to the comments under this theme: in order to achieve work life balance benefits, reduce work requests &amp; contact and cost savings to Swale House, the closure on Friday at 1:30pm is necessary.</b></p> <p><b>However, it is understood that there may be some occasions and some staff that may have to work Friday afternoons. This will only be on the understanding that it is from</b></p> |

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|   |           | <p><b>home and that are on tasks that do not require communication with others and that no meetings are arranged or emails sent. This will be monitored to ensure this is in line with business need as part of the monitoring actions set out below. This needs to be fair and consistent across the organisation.</b></p>   |
| <p>Concerns over initial consultation process</p> | <p>16</p> | <p>There were comments received expressing the view that the initial staff survey consultation in October 2022 wasn't carried out adequately and as a result the results of that initial survey cannot be relied upon</p> <p>One comment states <i>"the October consultation was presented in such an ambiguous way that it was designed with the intention to encourage a positive response on reduced hours as this is the cheapest option. No one wants to see redundancies, but that was the threat"</i>.</p> <p>Responses here state the survey was <i>"poorly written"</i> and was <i>"flawed from the outset"</i> as it omitted key information and therefore it's felt by some that it carries no validity in the decision-making process.</p> <p>Respondents suggest that the survey email was <i>"too light on detail"</i> and not enough information was provided to have assisted staff in making informed decisions in ranking the proposals. Responses here state that <i>"intentional or not, the survey was misleading, meaning that the results were probably "skewed" as with more information given, people's initial ranking to that survey could have been different"</i>.</p> <p>Several comments under this theme also mention the low response rate and cite the stats which show that only a quarter of the workforce overall elected that the 34 hour week was their preferred option so it is questioned whether this can be described as <i>"the most popular first choice"</i> as it is described in the consultation document.</p> <p><b>In response to comments under this theme, it is recognised and accepted by Senior Management that the emailed survey that was sent out to staff in October asking for views on different ideas relating to employee pay and potential savings, could have been handled differently.</b></p> <p><b>That was not a formal consultation, but an informal exercise to help inform the budget setting process. It is noted on reflection that this could have been handled in a</b></p> |

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|                               |          | <p>different way and perhaps not enough information was provided to staff, and therefore advice was sought before entering into this formal staff consultation before a formal decision is taken.</p> <p><b>This Staff Consultation document was sent to the Trade Unions prior to launching the official consultation period and they have encouraged their members to engage with this process.</b></p>  |
| <p>Shared Service queries</p> | <p>7</p> | <p>There were 7 respondents who made comments or raised questions about the impact of Shared Services under the proposals. There were practical questions asked about the whether SBC will proportionately pay less now towards the other Mid Kent Services.</p> <p>Respondents here state they <i>“don’t believe the impact on shared services have been fully explored including the demands on officer time that arise because of the need to balance the work of multiple authorities, which can lead to an extremely pressured working week and subsequently results in extra hours being worked”</i>.</p> <p>Several comments received were clearly from the Legal Services team who work across multiple authorities, who queried how they will be able to respond to their clients’ needs on reduced hours, when their clients and associated statutory bodies are not working reduced hours. They state that each Mid Kent authority expects a level of service with no consideration of the other Authorities.</p> <p><b>In response to the comments received under this theme; Legal services record the hours they charge to each partner authority. The cost of the service is then split between the partners according to the percentage of chargeable time attributed to each. Should Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Councils require a legal cover on a Friday afternoon, the additional resource required would be chargeable to them, not to Swale. The Head of MKLS is looking at how this is resourced either by using Locum staff or by a rota. Further discussions are being held with Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells to ensure the legal team is not put under undue pressure.</b></p> |

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| <p>Work-life balance</p>                   | <p>14</p> | <p>The comments received under this theme were generally positive citing that reducing to a 34-hour week could help improve employee’s work/life balance and general wellbeing.</p> <p><i>One comment said “I’m in support of the change in working hours. This will give staff a better work life balance, and if people want to earn extra money through working another job, this gives some ability to do so”</i></p> <p>Others were looking forward to the additional two days off at Christmas which they said is a welcome proposal which can really help to improve emotional wellbeing by spending that extended time with friends and family.</p> <p>However, it can be noted that even some of the positive respondents caveated their response with concern that the workload will not be reviewed sufficiently in line with the reduction in hours, which could end up having a detrimental effect on wellbeing and not the positive impact that they’d hoped.</p> <p><b>The response to this theme echo’s that of the “workload” theme above. It is positive that some staff can see the potential benefits to work/life balance/wellbeing that the reduction in hours can bring if workloads are reviewed and managed correctly.</b></p> |
| <p>Recruitment/<br/>retention concerns</p> | <p>15</p> | <p>There were 15 responses received which aspects of Recruitment and Retention in their comments. Generally these were of a concerned nature with regard to not being able to retain our talent or recruit in new talent if we don’t receive a Pay Award and remain competitive with other Kent Local Authorities.</p> <p>The response from UNISON on this theme states <i>“This will not help us with recruitment or retention, staff morale is already very low”</i></p> <p>One of the comments did have a positive sentiment stating <i>“I am supportive. This could be an important recruitment tool that gives SBC an edge it needs in finding quality staff.”</i></p>   |

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|                         |    | <p>However, the majority of the other comments cited fears that by not awarding a Pay Award, SBC could become uncompetitive and staff may be forced to leave SBC to seek alternative employment.</p> <p>Some feel that their service areas have already been struggling to recruit new staff and state that <i>“cutting 3 hours instead of an increase in salary is not going to help the recruitment and retention situation”</i></p> <p>Many responses here talk about the “extortionate” rates that we are already having to pay some temps/locums due to already not being able to recruit permanent staff and it is feared that even more money will spent on temps to “pick up the workload” if substantive staff’s hours are reduced.</p> <p><b>We hope that that the move to a 34 hour week and being the first Local Authority in Kent to do so, means Swale will be seen as a progressive, forward thinking Authority who puts it’s staff’s wellbeing and work/life balance at the forefront. If workloads are properly managed, we see that this could be used as an important tool to rebrand the Council and give the SBC the USP it need’s to recruit and retain good quality talent.</b></p> |
| Queries/<br>Suggestions | 36 | <p>There were many queries, questions and suggestions put forward as part of the consultation responses. A variety have been included below but the individual comments will be answered formally in a response document sent out to staff.</p> <p><i>“It all seems very rushed and not thought out, it feels like someone really likes the idea and has decided to run with it. Is there a possibility to delay it and bring it in at a later date if needed so there won't be any hiccups? As with all consultations there really is a feeling of it's a done deal, why bother, it's affecting morale.”</i></p> <p><i>“Is there not an option to trial the new terms for a period before implementing permanent contract changes?”</i></p>  |



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|                  |   | <p><i>“What is the impact on employees who are part time who already work less than 34hrs/week?”</i></p> <p><i>“Will new roles be recruited to as 34 hours, in which case the salary will reflect this and be reduced?”</i></p> <p><i>“2% pay increase for 2023/24 then permanent 4 day working week from 2024/25 with pay then being reviewed annually as normal”</i></p> <p><i>“It is not particularly clear from the consultation how future pay rises beyond 2023/24 will be managed, although assume that this will be raised on an annual basis as has always been done and with Unison?”</i></p> <p><i>“For us to finish early on Friday afternoon we would have to cancel the afternoon post collections for both whistle and Royal mail.”</i></p> <p><b>The answers to some of the questions raised were already set out in the FAQ’s. For the questions received anonymously via the online survey, we will endeavour to address the queries in a consultation response document to all staff. Additionally, service specific operational questions should be picked up with departmental managers and Heads of Service.</b></p> <p><b>Any personal, HR related queries should be directed to Sam Connelly.</b></p> |
| No reason given. | 5 | Five respondents didn’t indicate a reason for the sentiment behind their comment. Of these five responses, two were not in favour of the proposals, two were supportive of the proposals and one was neutral in their response.   |
| Other            | 6 | Below are some of the “other” comments people submitted to the consultation, which includes comments of both a positive and negative sentiment.   |

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|  |  | <p><i>“Please don't dress this up as an 8% increase in pay. It's not bankable. I think there is a danger than goodwill might expire and there could be more of a "working to rule" attitude”</i></p> <p><i>“I am happy to support the reduction in hours to 34 at same whole time salary. However i do feel this needs to be fully reviewed and considered as a more long term projection to give reassurance and stability to the SBC staff”</i></p> <p><i>“I welcome the new proposed change to working hours. I think that it is a positive approach to a constantly adapting working environment and shows that Swale Borough Council are forward thinking”</i></p> <p><i>“I like the idea of the change of hours for the working week especially if this helps not to have redundancies”</i></p> <p><i>“I have no concerns with the shortened hours for the council as a whole (other than of course teams such as CCTV) on the proviso that my pay is maintained and i receive my increments agreed within my banding and that doesn't change (I'm not at the top of my grade) then I'm happy to finish early as long as the whole council does”</i></p> |
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**Trade Union (UNISON) response**

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| <p><b>Trade Union Comments - sent via Julie May as part of the consultation process</b></p> | <p><b>Management Response</b></p> |
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Unison is not in favour of the 34-hour working week proposal, our objections are detailed below:

- Major increases in the cost of living over recent years have significantly reduced the value of staff wages a reduced working week will not solve this.
- Workloads will not be reduced significantly enough to allow people to work any less hours, staff are already under immense pressure and many work more than 37 hours to stay on top of workloads.
- Inflation is at an all-time high, staff are unable to pay their bills, heat their houses and put food on their tables, a reduced working week is not going to impact this.
- This will not help us with recruitment or retention, staff morale is already very low.
- With home working and people being able to work remotely anywhere from the country, the low wages provided by the Council will only mean that people will seek employment elsewhere. This must be factored into account.
- A 34-hour week has no benefit to those staff who already choose to work part time.
- Appropriate reward is needed to sustain the morale and productivity of employees in their crucial role of delivering high quality services.

It can be seen that the Unison response also falls into the themes listed above, primarily detailing concerns over the *Cost of living crisis*, *Workloads* and *Recruitment/Retention* challenges.

It is believed that Management have responded to each of the concerns outlined in the TU objection in the above table, but a response has also been summarised below for ease:

- In response to the concerns over the cost-of-living crisis, analysis of the comments under this theme, showed correlation between the lower grades and a negative response regarding the cost of living and a preference for a Pay Award.

An amendment has been put into the budget proposals which recommends that staff on grade 5 and below are paid a one-off payment of £1,000 pro rata. This is equivalent of 4-5% of Grade 2-3 salaries and 3-4% of Grade 4-5 salaries. This will be made in addition to increments (where they are due)

- In response to the concerns raised regarding workloads; EMT are continuing to work with Heads of Service to identify which areas of work can cease or be modified to take account of the lesser weekly working hours. It is acknowledged that the reduction in working hours needs to be supported by a real change in workloads or processes to ensure that staff are not continuing to do the same level of work in less time and Heads of Service are working with their teams to identify where this can be achieved.

There is a commitment by EMT to continually review the levels of work and an assurance is made that “pinch points” will be managed in line with Council policies, as they are now; for example, Elections, Closure of Accounts etc.

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|  | <p>To mitigate the implications of the reduced hours and impact to service delivery, corporate service standards will be amended to reflect that tasks will take longer following the reduction. EMT and Heads of Service will work together to ensure that Members, and the Public, are fully informed of the new service standards for each department and clear communications of any changes will be published.</p> <p>In addition, the council is developing a corporate transformation programme and service areas are continuing to look at ways to reduce workload, be more efficient and do things differently.</p> <p>With any change process, there will be things that will come up that were not foreseen even with the work to assess impact. It is essential that there is regular monitoring and review and action put in place to address issues. It will be compulsory to include a discussion at monthly 121s with all staff and team meetings. EMT will also receive a quarterly implementation report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• With regard to recruitment and retention, we hope that that the move to a 34 hour week and being the first Local Authority in Kent to do so, means Swale will be seen as a progressive, forward thinking Authority who puts it's staff's wellbeing and work/life balance at the forefront.</li></ul> <p>If workloads are properly managed, we see that this could be used as an important tool to rebrand the Council and give the SBC the USP it need's to recruit and retain good quality talent.</p> |
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**NB – The consultation on the 34 hour week did not form part of the formal Pay Claim Negotiations.**

**These discussions have not yet concluded are still going between the Chief Executive, Head of HR and the Trade Union.**