

35-hour working week proposal: clarifications following media coverage

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You may have seen a press article about the proposed reduction in the standard working week from 37 hours per week to 35 hours per week. I understand this may have caused concern, so I wanted to provide some important information to clarify current proposals.

Firstly, the formal consultation on these proposals began only this week with communications to staff and trade unions. Letters to individual employees will follow in the coming days, which provide detail about the proposals and the ways in which feedback, queries and suggestions can be submitted for consideration.

I would like to clarify that:

- It is suggested that the Council is committed to dismissal and re-engagement ('fire and rehire') as a means to achieving its aims. This is not the case. Whilst it is one possible route to implementing a contractual change, the Council would not consider dismissal and re-engagement without having exhausted all possible other routes. Our next steps are to formally consult employees and trade unions on proposals, and this began this week.
- Parties engaging with each other openly and genuinely considering the points that are put forward. The Council will consider any reasonable alternative proposals with a view to reaching an agreed outcome.
- Even in a dismissal and re-engagement scenario, staff would not be required to re-apply for their jobs.
- This proposal does not result in fewer staff and there are no plans to make compulsory redundancies. It is recognised that a reduced working week has a potential impact on individual and team capacity and workloads would be managed by senior managers in collaboration with teams, and may involve changes to service standards and delivery as appropriate and as informed through feedback and discussions during the consultation process.

- Regarding pay freeze concerns, hourly rates will continue to increase by nationally agreed pay awards. Pay preservation will aid the transition whilst preserving pay at the equivalent of 37 hours, as at 31 March 2025, whilst working 35 hours. This is necessary for the Council's financial stability, even though it's a tough decision.
- It is true to say that there is a need to make financial savings. The Council has a statutory requirement to present a balanced budget. Reducing the working week to 35 hours would enable the Council to save money whilst balancing staff impact as far as possible through pay preservation.

Following our discussions with Trade Unions to date as part of collective bargaining, our position is now that:

- New starts have begun to be recruited on a core contract of a maximum of 35 hours per working week.
- Part time employees are not affected by the proposal.
- Term time employees are defined as part time for the purposes of this proposal.
- Teaching Staff (those on SNCT terms and conditions) are not affected by the proposal.
- Employees on Craft terms and conditions are included in the proposal.
- Clarification that Chief Officials have always been considered as part of these proposals.
- Annual leave entitlement is confirmed not to be detrimentally impacted by these proposals.
- Proposed Implementation– rather than a mid-year 2024/25 implementation that reduced the benefit of the pay award, any pay preservation would be offered at the annual salary level as at 31st March 2025 (ensuring the 2024/25 pay award is fully preserved for all staff).
- Pay preservation offer – Pay will be preserved until any 35 hour annual salary is equal to or greater than the 37 hour preserved annual salary as at 31st March 2025. Hourly rates will continue to increase by nationally agreed pay awards. Pay preservation will aid the transition whilst preserving pay at the equivalent of 37 hours, (as at 1st April 2025, whilst working 35 hours). This is necessary for the Council's financial stability, even though it's a tough decision
- Pension protection – pension protection would be offered if the working week were to be amended for staff.