



**Local Government Professionals Australia, SA**

**EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM 2020**

## **ASSIGNMENT-GROUP 3**

**If you could make one major improvement in Local Government in the next 18 months what would it be?**

***Work-Life Balance: Opportunities for Achieving High Performance, Productivity and Work Satisfaction***

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**Due Date: 3 December 2020**



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## Executive Summary

This report provides recommendations on opportunities for a major improvement in Local Government in the next 18 months. The topic selected by our Group is Work/Life Balance (WLB), specifically what opportunities there are to achieve high performance, productivity and work satisfaction in a WLB environment.

This topic was chosen largely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and how that event affected work arrangements for many Local Government staff (both indoor and outdoor). It highlighted the opportunities for working differently and how, if initiated correctly, this could lead to improved WLB for staff without sacrificing community services and deliverables.

Throughout Local Government, we found that there was an overwhelming trend that strongly suggests the need for Local Government Authorities (LGAs) to continue to explore employee WLB options. Findings highlighted that there are still a significant number of employees who are not undertaking any type of flexible working arrangements, and the importance of ensuring that WLB policies are developed in a way that can be adopted by both indoor and outdoor staff.

Additional findings related to the social, emotional and physical advantages WLB brings, but interestingly disadvantages experienced by LGAs were also identified. Disadvantages relate to the alternative perspectives each tier of the workforce has, and how the public will perceive certain applied initiatives.

WLB is not about equity, but about the strategies that work for LGAs, their staff and the community to improve overall quality of life. We recommend that Local Government has an opportunity to become more modern in WLB approaches, by instilling an organisational culture supporting WLB initiatives and displaying trust in employees. In addition, we recommend that LGAs document and embed formal and appropriate policies which support WLB initiatives for all categories of staff members, and/or document the initiatives in Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs). Together with appropriately trained Human Resources (HR) staff and the right Information Technology (IT) support we say that this will attract the next generation of workers, and develop new norms with innovative approaches. Thus, making Local Government a more sought after employer within the public sector.



## Introduction

Group Three considered the question, ‘if we could make one major improvement in Local Government in the next 18 months what would it be?’ The topic chosen was WLB, focussing on opportunities for achieving high performance, productivity and work satisfaction. The topic was chosen as a result of the Covid -19 pandemic and how the event affected work arrangements for Local Government staff.

Project research included consultation with staff from all levels of South Australian Local Government, using a variety of mediums.

A survey was circulated to staff within South Australian LGAs containing WLB themed questions. Over 300 responses were received, providing a large pool of responses yielding reliable quantitative data which allowed the drawing of conclusions based on the questions asked. Customer Service (CS) staff were surveyed to obtain a community perspective.

CEO’s were interviewed. These interviews provided information about initiatives which have already been implemented, and future possible initiatives while also providing qualitative information about what has worked well and what initiatives may need further development.


Research has been conducted and studies considered which explore different options to achieve WLB while still achieving high performance, work satisfaction and productivity.

We want to understand the opportunities for working differently, how to ensure that all staff have access to WLB initiatives and how this will amount to improved WLB for staff without sacrificing services and deliverables to the community.

## Analysis and Discussion

The WLB construct has been defined as “the integration and balancing of personal and family life with paid work” (Dulk & Groeneveld 2012; Facer & Wadsworth 2008, cited in Feeney & Stritch 2019, p423). Feeney and Stritch (2019, p423) state “the expectations and demands an individual faces as an employee may take away or conflict with the demands and obligations of the roles an individual has in private life, such as being a parent, child or spouse”. As a result, people face the challenges of balancing these different, and often competing, roles.

Having a family friendly culture and instilling formal policies in this regard are directly linked to WLB (Feeney & Stritch 2019). Having alternative work schedules such as flextime, and



compressed work weeks can promote WLB (Society for Human Resource Management 2007, cited in Feeney & Stritch 2019, p424). Conversely, sometimes organisations place greater value on behaviours which impede WLB, such as working when you are sick or staying at work late (Wadsworth & Owens 2007, p78, cited in Feeney & Stritch 2019, p423). It has been found that, for those described as state employees, having policies which offer working a flexible schedule and working from home, significantly support WLB – for both women and men (Feeney & Stritch 2019, p440). It was suggested that, “for organizations seeking to advance WLB among women, it will be increasingly important to implement policies that enable employees to make the best choices for their particular family situation, as compared with one-type-fits-all, static policies” (Feeney & Stritch 2019, p440). It is important to ensure that WLB policies are developed in such a way that they are able to be utilised by all employees, both indoor and outdoor.

When concentrating on Work from Home (WFH) specifically as a WLB initiative, there has been many research documents and articles published. In particular, the Covid -19 pandemic has magnified WFH as a topic of importance for employees and employers alike, including within Local Government. In 2007, Baker, Avery and Crawford (2007) published a research paper on “Satisfaction and perceived productivity when professionals work from home”. The study investigated how WFH initiatives can be better supported with the objective to improve understanding of how employers can assist employees who want to WFH. The research variables discussed were organisational and job related factors, individual work styles, and household characteristics. Twelve hypotheses were tested in relation to satisfaction and perceived productivity when WFH. The results indicated that “organisational and job related factors are more likely to affect WFH employees’ satisfaction and perceived productivity than work styles and household characteristics” (Baker, Avery & Crawford 2007, p37). Organisational and job related factors include management culture and technical and HR support. As mentioned above by Feeney and Stritch (2019), Baker, Avery and Crawford (2007, p55) reported that “It appears that there is no ‘one size fits all’ form of assistance related to work style and household variables”. It was revealed that “HRM practitioners can play key roles in assisting WFH employees” and “HR departments may be able to contribute to the development of a specific internal culture that is highly supportive of WFH” (Baker, Avery & Crawford 2007, p55). It was suggested by Baker, Avery and Crawford (2007, p55) that “This may include establishing policies and procedures for dealing with potential problems and assigning responsibility for WFH issues to a particular person. It may also involve ensuring that the management culture is one of trust and support”.



## Available flexible working conditions in surveyed LGAs

A survey was conducted between 14 September and 23 September 2020 across registered LGAs of the Local Government Professionals Program. The survey resulted in 308 responses. The data from the survey appears in Appendix 1.

Research discovered the WLB options which were available to staff. 142 responses to the survey suggested that WFH was a new option provided due to the Covid -19 Pandemic. 58 respondents said they work part-time and 25 respondents work a shorter week. 7 respondents' job share and only one was transitioning to retirement. A significant number of respondents, numbering 123, explained they are not currently enjoying any flexible working conditions. 81.5% of respondents can accrue TOIL, Flexitime and RDO'S.

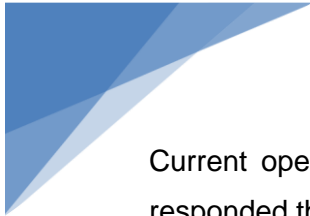
At the time the survey was conducted, it identified that 47.4% of respondents were working from home as a flexible working condition. Of the 47.4%, only 5.5% identified as being unproductive in a home environment. This could be a result of the survey's additional question 'Were you provided with the tools to achieve your job when working from home?' where 5.8% advised they were not.

When asked 'What WLB you would take advantage of?' WFH was the highest preference with 71.1% followed by 50% preferring a 9-day fortnight, and a 4-day week at 46.1%. 29.9% of staff identified earlier starts as preference, with shorter days at 28.2% and later starts at 27.6%.

When asked why employees don't take advantage of WLB options the survey identified 21% do not have this option, 11% felt unsupported by management, 6% had financial concerns and 3% did not want WLB options.

Out of 308 responses only 3% of employees are not interested in utilising WLB options, which strongly suggests the need for organisations to continue exploring staff WLB opportunities and initiatives. Responses support the findings from articles which explain the importance organisational culture has on WLB initiatives, and how it provides staff with the tools required to engage in WLB.

To obtain a community perspective, a survey of CS staff was conducted at the respective LGA of each project group participant. The questions and responses for the survey can be found in Appendix 2.



Current opening hours of LGAs are generally deemed sufficient, however most CS staff responded that they have received comments from the community regarding inadequacies of staff availability. It is not clear if these complaints are directly linked to flexible working arrangements, rather are comments about staff availability in general.

Responses to queries as to whether it is harder to reach staff on flexible work arrangements for customer enquiries were inconclusive. Overall, CS staff are aware of staff members' flexible work arrangements and are able to leave messages for them to respond to customer queries.

CS staff indicate that it is challenging to take advantage of flexible working arrangements, although the majority of them would like the opportunity to.

### **Advantages of flexible working conditions arising from the survey**


The Covid-19 pandemic gave many of our 308 survey respondents the ability to WFH, this gave employees an insight as to how this WLB initiative, if implemented, would benefit employees, LGAs, and, in turn, the community through more efficient, satisfied and productive staff. The following section of the report discusses the results of the survey which identify advantages of flexible working conditions. Detailed results of the survey appear in Appendix 1.

Evidence from survey results was positive towards WLB initiatives. Some respondents who worked from home during Covid-19 felt they were more productive as they did not have the distractions of a workplace and were able to achieve a higher and more efficient output of quality work.

Some respondents indicated they would like to spend more time with their families and watch children's activities. Another overwhelmingly positive response was to schedule personal appointments without disruption to the work environment.

Additional time for employees to undertake leisure and recreation, which included physical activity for their personal enjoyment and wellbeing also featured in survey results.

Time to care for relatives was identified several times. As the Local Government Workforce is aging, the ability to care for elderly relatives is as important to some respondents as being able to care for children.



Another positive response received related to travel time, mainly in the metropolitan areas. Reduced travel also has a positive environmental impact with reduced traffic on the road and people using saved travel time towards alternative activities.

Additional time for employees to undertake study for their own professional development came up multiple times, as did the need to transition to retirement in a way that suits the employee and the workplace.

### **Opportunities for improvement of flexible working conditions arising from the survey**

The survey cited a number of instances where the ability of workers to participate in WLB opportunities was dependant on their line manager's preference. This has the potential to create a disparity of power between the two parties because managers choose who does and does not have access to the conditions. Well established guidelines would need to be implemented to overcome these inconsistencies but this doesn't resolve the issue of some workers not feeling comfortable in approaching their manager.

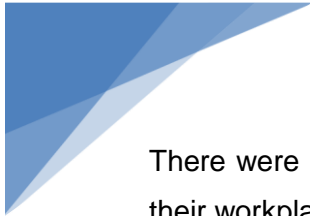
During Covid -19, some respondents indicated that staff were not available, and the ability to collaborate was limited. There was also a sense of isolation felt, with 20% of respondents reporting feeling isolated.

55% of communication is conveyed through body language (Mehrabian 1981), the lack of face to face communication meant workers struggled to develop a connection. The lack of interpersonal communication increases potential complaints to HR due to email miscommunications, and lack of interpersonal communication having an impact on the organisation's overall culture.

Additionally, concerns were raised around the 4 day week, 9 day fortnights with respondents keen to take up these options but concerned that it would decrease their working hours. This may be due to conditions not being described as compressed working hours. Respondents felt moving to part time work wasn't an option due to the reduction in wage.

Another area of concern was the increase of reported stress and work pressure cause by WFH. There was a perceived pressure that being allowed to work from home caused people to feel as though they needed to compensate, or validate they were undertaking meaningful work. Respondents reported answering emails late at night or working longer hours to justify flexible conditions.





There were several respondents who found their work and personal lines blurred by having their workplace in their home. “One issue that many ignore is burnout. Sure, it happens in the office too, but there is something unsettling about getting up and going to work walking distance from your bed” (News Bites Pty Ltd 2020). Living and working in the same environment meant they could not effectively detach from work. Many reported they responded to emails and requests on their days off, some felt there was pressure to do this.

The spectrum covered by Local Government is vast. In considering WLB across the sector, it needs to be recognised that WLB opportunities will not be equally suitable for all employees. Therefore, WLB options will need to be considered for each category of employee, rather than adopting a one size fits all approach.

Strong HR systems will be required to overcome these issues, the implementation of WLB and also in the negotiations of future EBA's. The purpose of WLB is not about equity, it's about strategies that work for both the business and the individual to reduce their stress and improve their overall quality of life.

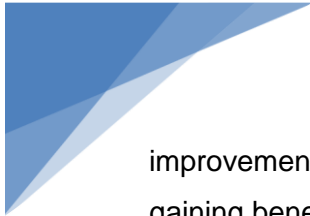
## **LGAs Moving Forward**

CEOs of project group participant LGAs were surveyed regarding the current WLB initiatives within their organisations and the opportunities available for future initiatives. This section of the report reflects the thoughts and responses of those CEOs and what they mean for LGAs moving forward. The survey questions and responses appear in Appendix 3.

CEOs recognised some potential restrictions regarding the implementation of a four day work week for staff. The main considerations are whether there would be an impact on the services to the community. Opportunities resulting from greater work/life flexibility for staff were also recognised. In particular, the attraction of a wider range of candidates for roles, and happier, more productive staff.

CEOs considered the cost savings associated with WLB initiatives. Opportunities include a reduction in employment costs, reduced absenteeism, and more productive staff. Allowing staff to work a broader span of hours would result in assets being used more and improved customer service.

The key to long term success of flexible working conditions is to regularly communicate with each worker utilising the initiatives in order to review individual circumstances as they often change. The flexibility offered is something that will need to be a part of continuous



improvement, constantly monitored to make sure both employees and the community are gaining benefit from the flexible working arrangement.

LGAs offer work that has a purpose. Working for Local Government provides employment which makes a difference to the community, environment, society, and to people's lives. It is often work where employees can see tangible results of the effort they are putting in. LGAs need to change the stereotypes associated with them of working with old systems and not being able to make and sustain changes. LGAs need to promote the new way of flexible working partnerships between employees and the company as a modern working environment. These partnerships foster better service coverage offered to the community, where and when the community needs it. They also create happier flexible teams who are productive and adaptable to the changing climate and extra demands constantly placed on the Local Government sector. Becoming more modern towards working flexibly will not only better manage the ageing workforce, it will also help attract the next generation of workers who will provide a fresh approach and make LGAs an employer of choice. The only thing that has been missing is the flexible working arrangements that are now commonly found in the private sector and is a necessity to attract a new dynamic workforce that will future proof Local Government.

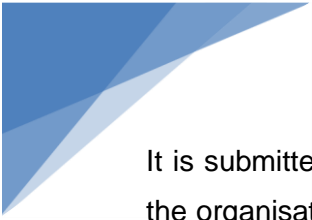
## Conclusion and Recommendations

If we could make one major improvement in Local Government in the next 18 months what would it be? The major improvement researched by Group Three was about WLB and the opportunities there are to achieve high performance, productivity and work satisfaction.

Following a review of published articles, the review of industry wide surveys and conversations with South Australian Local Government CEOs, it became clear that LGAs have an opportunity to achieve high performance, productivity and work satisfaction from their employees by supporting and embedding WLB initiatives.

It is recommended that LGAs review current EBAs and HR policies to ensure that suitable flexible working conditions and WLB initiatives are available for all employees. It is recognised that a one-size-fits-all approach is unsuitable. It is important to ensure that there are initiatives offered which will be suitable for both inside, outside and CS staff.

Staff should be engaged in the conversation about what initiatives they would like to see implemented. Also, it is important that HR staff are trained and equipped to support staff utilising flexible working arrangements.



It is submitted that initiatives to support WLB will only succeed if they are embedded within the organisation and are accepted as part of the organisational culture. WLB initiatives must be documented and well understood, which means training must be provided to staff and managers. Additionally, the necessary tools must be made available to staff, who also need to be supported with the ongoing use of these tools in order to ensure high performance and productivity is achieved and maintained.



## Reflection

On our groups' first meeting, we went away and thought about what topics were important to us, but more importantly, relevant to Local Government.

At our second meeting we decided on the topic of WLB. We started researching early on in our project, gathering information to share with each other. Our Team TMS Profile supports this statement, our team rated very highly in the advising section.

Fitting our meetings in with busy work schedules has been difficult, sometimes team members were not able to make the scheduled zoom sessions which presented challenges as the project is a whole team approach.

To improve this situation team members who were present at the meetings provided information and thoughts that were contributed to those who were not able to attend. The whole team was kept up to date with progress and all were still able to provide their ideas.

Our group rated high in the Developing area of the Team TMS Profile, we collaborated very well together bouncing ideas off each other and were able to successfully put our thoughts into our project matter.

We rated lower in the Linking area of the Team TMS Profile. Our team members work preferences are in the Promoter, Organiser, Producer, Inspector and Developer areas. It did require effort to link our ideas together. Sometimes it did seem we were indecisive, but really, we didn't want to upset other team members. We feel we did get better with more robust discussion after our mid project reflection, and as the project progressed.

We received valued feedback from another ELP project group which we took into consideration when presenting our final project.

This has been a very enjoyable project for all of us, getting to know different ELP cohorts and making connections for future collaboration and career development within Local Government.



## References

Baker, E, Avery, G & Crawford, J 2007, 'Satisfaction and perceived productivity when professionals work from home', *Research and practice in human resource management*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 37-62.

Facer, R & Wadsworth, L 2008, 'Alternative work Schedules and work-family balance: A research note', *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, vol 28, 166-177. DOI: 10.1177/0734371X12449024

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Mehrabian, A. 1981. *Silent Messages: implicit communications of emotions and attitudes*. Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

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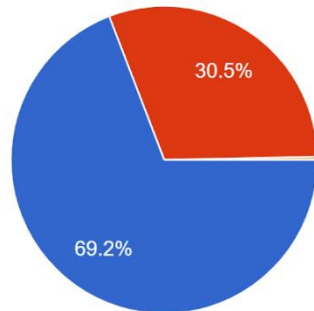
Society for Human Resource Management 2007, *Work/life balance series part I: Revisiting the work/life balance agenda*, Alexandria, VA.

Wadsworth, I & Owen, B 2007, 'The effects of social support on work-family enhancement and work-family conflict in the public sector', *Public Administration Review*, vol. 67, no. 1, pp. 75-86. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00698.x

## Appendix 1 – Data from Survey Conducted

### 1. What gender do you identify as?

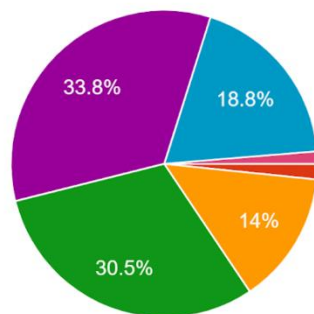
308 responses



- Female
- Male
- Meat popsicle (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOZKbJG4dn0>)

### 2. What is your age?

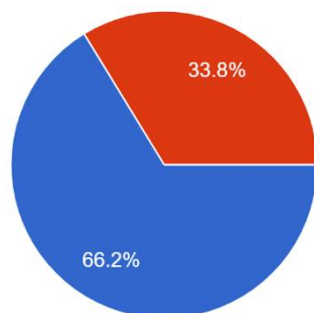
308 responses



- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

### 3. What best describes the council you work in?

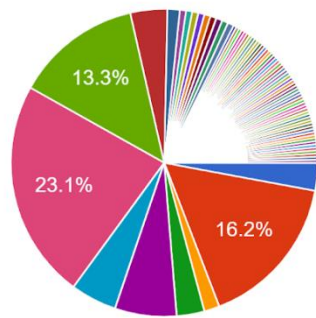
308 responses



- Metro
- Regional

#### 4. What is your position in council?

308 responses

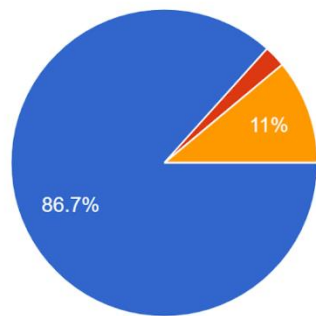


- Customer Service
- Administration officer
- Field Staff
- Compliance
- Planning / Development
- Senior Management
- Team Leader
- Manager

▲ 1/10 ▼

#### 5. Are you identified as a outside or inside worker?

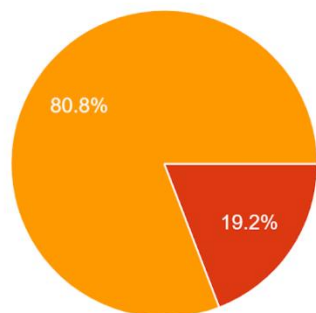
308 responses



- Inside
- Outside
- Both

#### 6. Please select your position in council

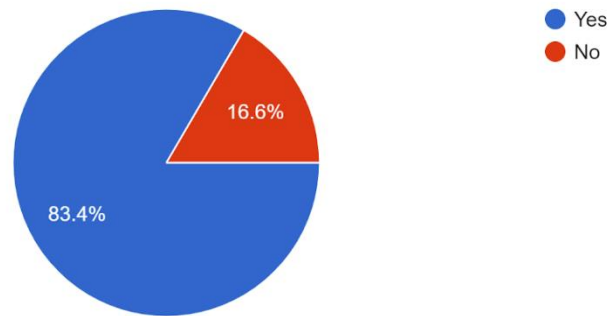
308 responses



- Casual
- Part-time
- Full-time

7. Does your work offer flexible work arrangements?

308 responses



**Q8. If yes, how does this help you in your private life? If no please skip question.**

**293 Responses**

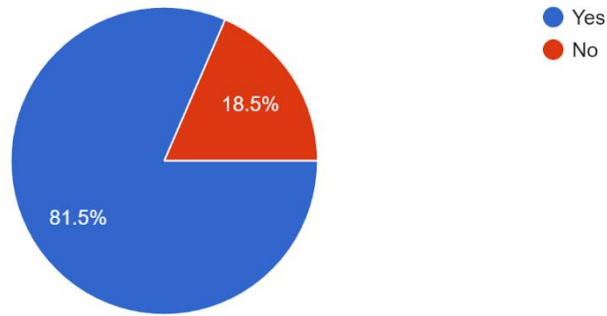
Count	Theme
84	Managing Children/family
51	Personal commitments/appointments
34	Overall wellbeing has improved
31	Work alternative, more efficient, hours (e.g. weekends)
30	Leisure/recreation
24	Does not practice or support flexible work arrangements
21	Reduced travel (to and from work)
11	Care for sick family
4	Study
1	Support partners career
1	Transition to retirement



<b>1</b>	<b>Flexible work arrangements in my work place do not work</b>
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9. Can you accrue TOIL, flexitime and RDO's?

308 responses



**Q10. When you use your time accrued what do you use it for?**

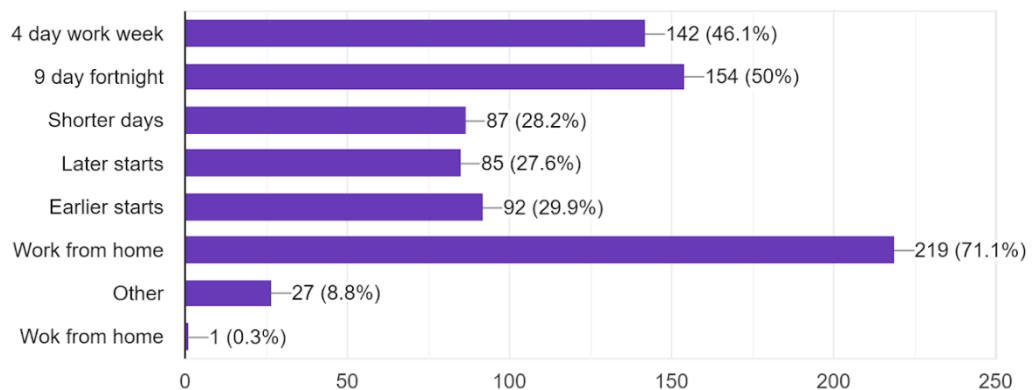
\*\* Open question yielded more than one response per survey respondent

**417 Responses**

Count	Theme
110	Appointments
96	Family
68	Leisure/Holiday
52	Rest and relaxation
40	House work/life admin
36	Friends/socialise
29	Cannot accrue or N/A
15	Study
12	Finishing Early/Starting late
6	Exercise/Sport

### 11. What work / life balance options would you take advantage of?

308 responses



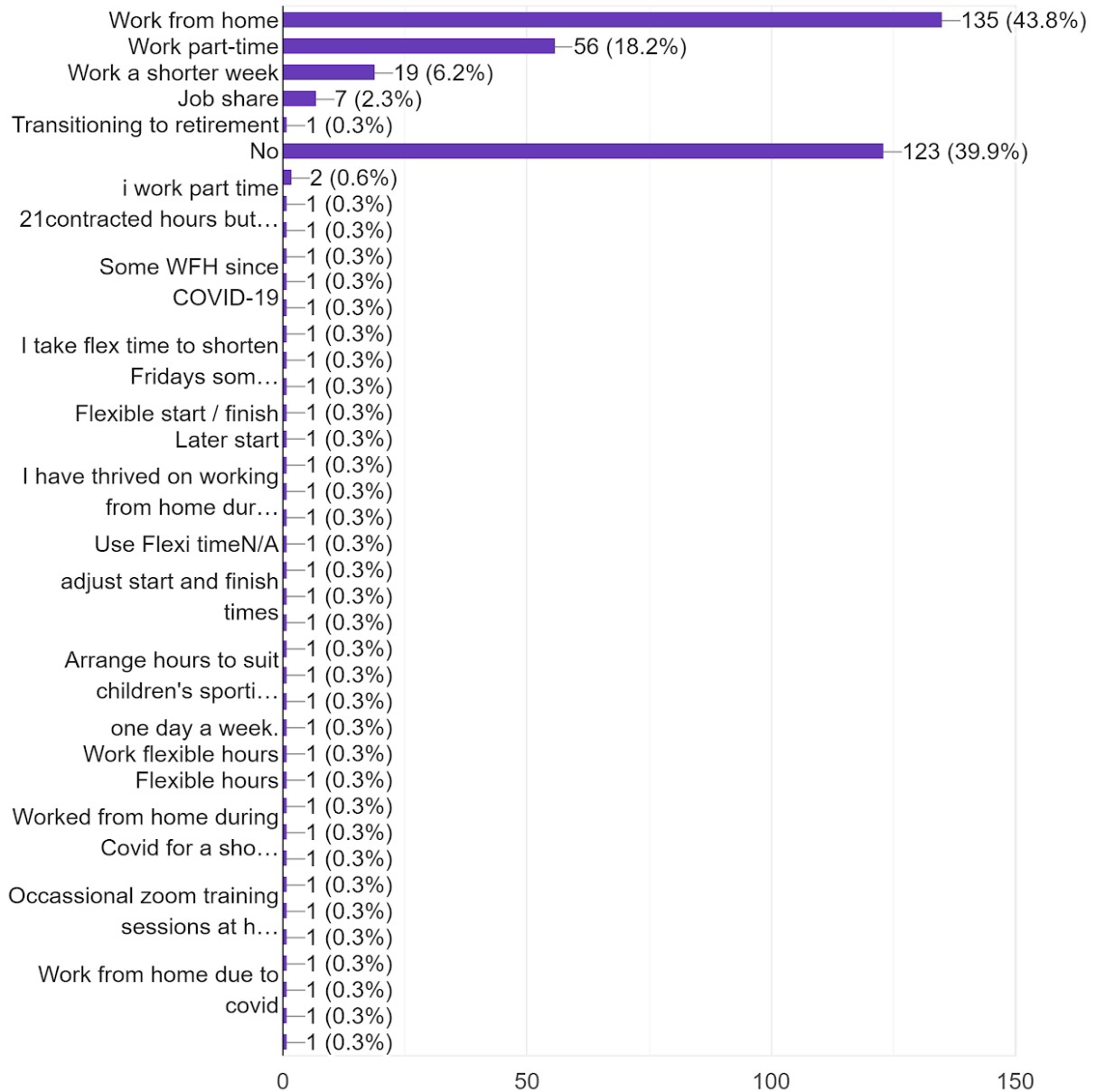
### Q12. Why would you like to take advantage of this option?

304 Responses

Count	Theme
82	Family Time
45	More manageable work life balance
32	More time for self including wellbeing
32	Work longer hours to have day off
30	More Productive/Better Output
26	Travel Reduction including environmental concerns
19	range of work life balance options needed
13	already have flexibility
8	Flexibility to suit Lifestyle
8	working towards retirement
4	maintain health
5	prefer flexitime - not wfh

### 13. Do you currently do any of the following?

308 responses





**Q 14. Why do you take advantage of these work/life balances?**

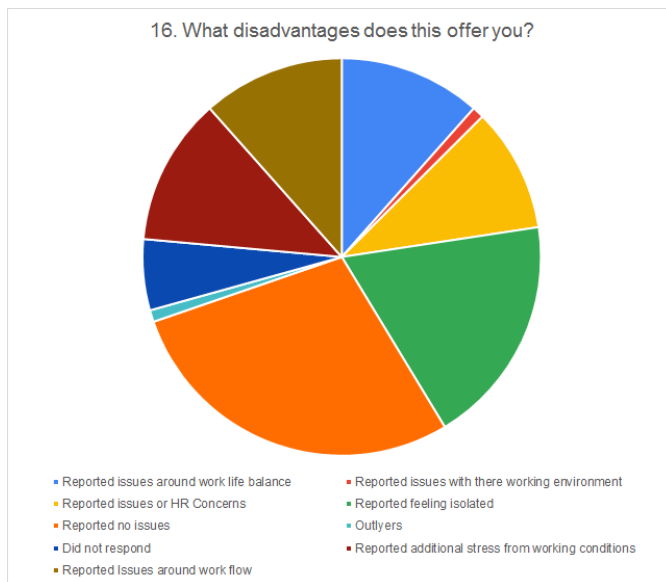
**251 Responses**

<b>Count</b>	<b>Theme</b>
46	Spend time with family
31	Children commitments
25	COVID
24	Balance between work life and personal life
22	To reduce commute time
18	Less distractions
18	Mental Health
14	Greater work productivity
12	Flexibility
12	Physical Health
11	Personal commitments
4	Personal development
2	Convenience
1	Age
1	Allows partner to work more
1	Continue working whilst sick
1	Financially able to work less
1	Housework
1	Mandatory
1	Personal hobby
1	Protect house in bushfire season
1	Relax
1	Safety
1	Save organisation money
1	Work longevity

## Q15. What benefits does this offer you?

199 Responses

Count	Theme
44	Time with family
35	Better Work Life Balance
28	Focus on work
28	Time for self
27	Time Management/Flexibility
18	Health and Wellbeing
13	Less travel
4	none
2	miscellaneous



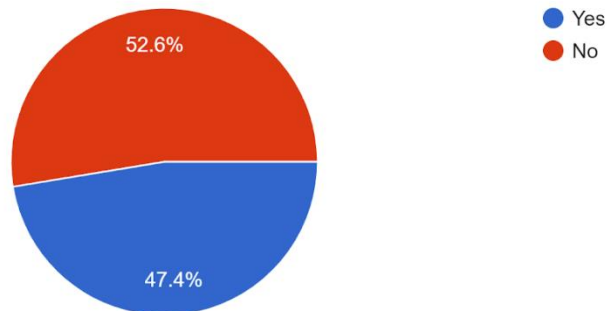
**Q17. If you don't do any of these things, why not?**

**307 Responses**

Count	Theme
140	N/A
65	option is unavailable
39	I do have this option
35	Not supported by management
18	Financial concerns
10	I don't want to

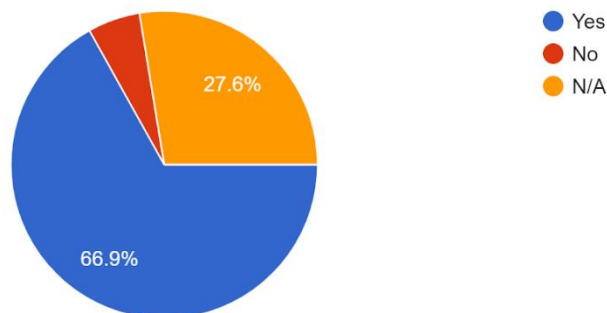
18. Do you work from home?

308 responses



19. Are you productive working from home?

308 responses



20. Were you provided with the tools to achieve your job when working from home?

308 responses



Q21. What has not worked when using work/life balance options in the workplace?

207 Responses

Count	Theme
42	Had No Problems
23	Missing out on Conversations / felt like out of the 'loop'
21	No Options for work life balance in my Position
20	Hard to organise / Get everyone to meetings
17	Lack of support
15	Not set up properly / Tech Issues
14	Pressure to be more productive
14	End up Working longer hours
13	Lack of flexibility
10	hard to find right balance
7	People take advantage
5	Issues with no roster for days off / hard to use toil
3	Customer support Suffered
3	Contacted when not working



**Q22. If you had a better work/life balance what do you think you could achieve?**

**308 Responses**

<b>Count</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<b>93</b>	<b>Health, Wellbeing, Less Stress, Exercise</b>
<b>72</b>	<b>Productivity, Focus on Job</b>
<b>32</b>	<b>Family, Relationships</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>Satisfied with Current Balance</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Job Satisfaction</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>No Answer Recorded</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Personal Time, Hobbies, Study</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>House Work, Gardening</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Flexibility,</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Achieve Great Things</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Community, Volunteering</b>





## Appendix 2 – Customer Service Survey Results

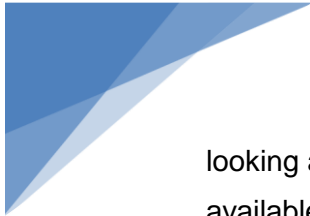
**Have you ever had comments from customers/community organisations either positive or negative about Council Opening Hours? If so can you recall the main points of the conversation?**

- I have not had much feedback about any positives or negatives regarding the Council Opening Hours. I have only had brief comments of people who call up in the afternoon and are grateful we are open till 5pm so they can drop by after work.
- Not so much the Yorketown Office but people have aired their frustration with the Minlaton Office being closed during lunch time, more so when the hours first changed. I think now that the public is used to the new hours they seem to not have any issues – however the feedback at the Minlaton Office may be different!
- I cannot recall any positive or negative comment in relation to opening hours. We have had the rare occasion where a customer might need a bin and advises they can't get in to the office or don't have a car to transport it, we can organise the outside crew to deliver it when they are in the area, but this is a very rare occurrence, and has never created any negative comment from the customer for me in relation to actual opening hours.
- Not at the Maitland Office where I am currently located but I did have a few comments about the Minlaton Office opening hours when I was working there. I think the lunchtime closure (1-2pm) frustrated customers if they had come in specifically for a Council matter.
- Working in Maitland and Yorketown I have not had any negative commenting about opening hours, however in Minlaton I have heard comments about the office closure from 1-2 but that has only been a minority of people and I think the main issue is because this is the time when people are also having lunch breaks and the only time they have to do jobs etc. However, the majority are happy with the hours and happily come at 2 once the office has reopened.
- The Minlaton office closes for one hour over lunch time for me to have lunch, go to the bank & post office. Customers often ignore the times written on the front door and are banging on the door for me to let them in when we're closed over this time. Customers have also made comments like 'I came here earlier but you were closed for lunch so had to come back' and have been annoyed at having to do that.
- The only comments I can recall about our opening times are that generally people are stunned when we open to the public at 8:30am. Councils around us have their staff start at 8:30am, however open to the public at 9am.
- No, I haven't.

- Although I have had a few customers come in earlier than our opening hours, may be due to our opening hours recently changing.
- They were always surprised we were open so early and close so late. People assume 9am and 5pm.
- No
- No
- No
- Yes, mainly positive comments about our opening time of 8.30am.
- I have had positive comments with regards to the contact centre being open at 8:30am, people expect it to be 9am
- Nothing specific – I think the public have in their mind that the 'office' is a 9-5 environment
- No, I can't recall any complaints about opening hours.
- I think the community are aware of our core business hours being 9-5 Mon – Fri and they seem quite happy with that no one has made comment about this to me
- Yes, mainly for people who work 9-5 Monday to Friday it's difficult for them to get into a front counter if they need to, no outside business hours service (apart from emergencies), etc.
- on occasions there have been certain types of customers who have commented on council not being open at a suitable time (such as weekends) for "people who have jobs and can't make it during business hours on weekdays".

**Have you had comments from customers/community organisations either positive or negative about the availability of Council staff? If so can you recall the main points of the conversation?**

- Yes it is quite frequent to have comments when a staff member is unavailable. A lot of the time people say they have tried to get in contact with a staff member but they rarely reply or its always hard to reach them (which may or may not be true in some situations). What mainly drives this is when with certain issues only a select person/s can help and they are not available therefore we can only leave that staff member/s a message to call a customer; we cannot assist further.
- It has been mentioned before that some staff are harder to get a hold of the others. Usually it's unreturned phone calls or emails. I don't feel it's due to any specific availability of staff but more so the prioritising of workloads.
- The only real issue I have found is when someone wants to speak to a particular officer immediately, and they may be with a customer, away from their desk temporarily, in a meeting, or out on the road for an inspection. For some reason often relating to development queries, people want to talk to someone immediately - often if they are




looking at purchasing a property so they can put an offer on it. Staff are not always available straight away, so a message has to be taken. I believe the expectation of an immediate conversation is because the customer feels urgency with their enquiry from their end and they get frustrated if they can't speak to someone at that particular moment.

- A lot of customers make comment about the availability about development services. Some customers call several days in row as they haven't heard from anyone – a lot of the time they are just querying rules & regulations for a specific property.
- I can't recall any complaints, most customers are happy for me to take a message and get the staff member to call them back when they are available.
- This is a common one – a large number of customers phone calls are taken as messages by reception as the staff member doesn't answer their phone, or asks receptionists to say they aren't available. This is extremely frustrating for both the customer & the receptionist who has to cop the criticism for staff being unavailable. Customers are often annoyed when they come into the Minlaton office asking to speak to someone about development only to be told the development officers work in other offices.
- Naturally we have plenty of people state "they were away yesterday as well" "or that's what I was told last time I called". Generally I feel people accept different working arrangements and will await the staff member to get back in contact with them, however anyone with a grudge / complaint will never be happy with what they're told.
- I haven't had any negative feedback as I always assure the customer that I will pass on their message to the relevant staff member if they aren't available at the time.
- When people have called numerous times and left messages but not heard back (sometimes a week or more later) they can then get agitated if that employee is still not contactable or at their desk if they have come in in person. Only negative when the timeframe for their query has blown out.
- Yes - Long queues / wait times
- Yes - Not being able to contact Health Inspectors at point of call
- Yes - negative - At concierge people are frustrated they cannot speak to someone from a department directly, and do not understand why noone from that department is available.
- I have often had customers complain about availability of many staff members, from different departments, before COVID-19 changed working arrangements, but it has become worse since March.
- Usually they would say that they had already left a message via voicemail, or they had sent emails and still not heard anything.

- Occasionally there may be a sense of negative frustration from the caller/customer if they are unable to speak to someone straight away. On the flip side of that sometimes an enquiry may come from someone who is just passing by and it would not be the first time, that they actually are able to speak to someone straight away - a planner face to face - as an example
- Yes, there have been comments about the availability of staff. There is an expectation by some members of the public that staff should be available when they come in, and if they have made contact by phone, they want to be contacted the same day. The comment has been made when staff haven't been available "oh right, working from home I suppose " with tone in their voice, even though they haven't been told this.
- There are some staff who do not respond to customers in a timely fashion and customers will ring us multiple times asking for contact or a response from the relevant person/department.
- When staff are on site they are a lot easier to contact for customer service and customers – so long as they answer their phones. I have had a few very frustrated calls/emails from customers that can't get in contact or haven't heard back from people – generally the ones on flexible working arrangement / working from home. People will say "I have left a message and they haven't called back or this is the ..... time I have called!!
- n/a
- negative comments are made about the availability of council staff on a daily basis when taking phone calls from customers who are seeking follow up or assistance from particular staff members. People often say I have called 3-4 times to speak to someone and have had no response.

**Have you found it hard to reach staff for customer enquiries on flexible working arrangements?**

- Yes. There are numerous occasions where we will have someone come in or call wishing to speak to a staff member but they are not working that day or are out of the office. It can be especially hard when for example, some customers can only come in when they finish work in the afternoon, and the staff member they are wishing to speak with finishes work at noon.
- It's usually when staff take leave – either no one is looking after their work while they're away or reception staff aren't made aware who to contact in their absence.
- I haven't really experienced any issues in relation to staff on part time hours. Fortunately on reception, we have a good understanding of who works what days. The main issue we continually find, is not being told when people are on leave, or if their calendars do not reflect when they are out of office. This does cause a lot of



confusion and frustration for us and customers. When people were working from home during Covid, I did not find it any more difficult to contact other staff. The only trouble I had sometimes was if customers want to speak to someone face to face instead of over the phone, and that isn't always possible, especially having 3 offices.

- Yes sometimes, but we are always aware on reception what staff's part-time days are or when they are away so we can relay that to the customer.
- I found that all staff working from home were readily available and I did not notice a decrease in availability (although I only work two days). If I couldn't get through to anyone I always had the option to email through a message and they can respond when they are available and I certainly think this help, as long as customers are contacted in a timely manner.
- Not really, if im aware they're not in I don't try to contact them, and just leave an email message.
- No, I find all of those that have these arrangements in place do their best to comply with their arrangement. I actually find some staff that are present in the office full time to be harder to reach.
- Sometimes it is hard to get in touch with staff, but customers are usually pretty understanding when it comes to our staff working certain hours, as mentioned above I just pass on their message and the staff get back to them as soon as they are available too.
- When we worked from home, we did mostly phone message to other staff. I heard no complaints about turnaround time. Sometimes its hard when we aren't aware of each particular persons hours if not full time. (a lot of staff schedules to remember)
- No - Because usually we have someone available to cover the staff member to help out.
- No
- Some staff yes – it seems to be the same staff that were hard to get a hold of on their desk phones too.
- The main issue was planning staff, when we did not have their mobile numbers and we could not call them, only send messages. This has improved since we are able to call their mobiles.
- It can be hard to reach staff regardless if they are on flexible arrangements or not.....
- Yes, there are a couple of staff who do not answer their phone, but overall, most staff do answer their phone or return the call in a timely manner.
- As above. Maybe an idea is that a set time is put in place where if they are working from home they have to return the call that day or within 24hrs just as a courtesy to say I don't have the info needed but I have received the message and I am looking into it or for info or I expect to have it by..... etc etc

- Assuming this means working from home/other offices/etc, not really, pretty much the same as it always was
- unfortunately, more times than not, it is harder to reach staff members for customers. Regardless of flexible working arrangements or not.

**Being the face of Council, do you have the opportunity for flexible working arrangements? If so, what type of arrangements do you have?**

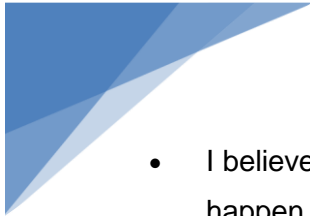
- I do not believe it would be recommended for me to have flexible working arrangements as a lot of the work in customer service is not just admin, but answering calls, working the counter and being present and available to assist other internal staff members. However if the reason to have flexible hours was for taking care of kids or other important responsibilities outside of work it could be considered as long as there is enough customer service staff in the office.
- I currently work part time (0.4) and I job share with another staff member.
- Yes, I have been extremely fortunate to be able to negotiate reduced hours after attempting to work 4 full days a week for quite some time. I now work 9am-5pm Mondays, and 9am-3pm Tues/Weds/Thurs. This creates a work/life balance that I can maintain, and I feel I am actually more productive and more focussed now with my reduced hours.
- it's very difficult to have flexible working arrangements on reception – we can't just leave early without making sure someone is here to cover. Especially at the moment with colleagues on reception already have their hours flexible, it wouldn't be possible for me to do this.
- I work part-time (two days) and have found work to be supportive of this arrangement especially now I have a family. We are lucky working in reception that we have casual clerical officers who are able to cover any days that we are sick/unavailable.
- I work three days a week which has been vital to me being able to work and having young children, however there is currently zero opportunity to work flexible hours (start earlier, work later, part days, or working from home).
- Yes, I work a 5 day fortnight to suit my home life and work balance.
- Being in customer service makes it difficult to be flexible, but I believe if you sit down and discuss hours with your team, you would be able to work out what times suit each individual and go from there. Me, personally don't have many commitments outside of work unlike some other staff: kids, sports etc.
- I feel like we have a flexible team and manager and when circumstances arise we are given the flexibility needed. I have worked from home with a sick child since covid a few times. I do think that we don't get the same amount of flexibility as other departments as we cant leave customer service empty unlike other departments can.

- Yes - We are fortunate to have flexible work arrangements in customer centre as in working part time and still be able to provide outstanding service to our residents.
- Yes - We do have the ability to work part time but not currently to be able to work from home.
- No - I think there is still opportunities for tech advancement within our council to allow for our team to have better flexible work arrangements
- We don't really have the facilities for that at present, I do believe that ##### and ##### are working on it.
- No, no flexibility due to phone system working at home
- I personally have not requested anything specific, given that the front counter and phones need to be 'manned' during our core hours 9-5. I do believe that with in our team, that a flexi start time could be negotiated if the situation arose e.g. rather than 8.45-5.15 possibly 8.30-5
- Customer service don't have the option for flexible working arrangements. We are customer facing and a small team, so this makes flexibility difficult. There is some flexibility to swap days off or make roster changes for personal appointments.
- Unfortunately as we are customer service our ability to work from home is impacted as it is unsafe to have only one person in the area. If the building goes into lock down then we are prepared to work from home as we can have the phones diverted and we have remote access arrangements. I think it would be great to have flexible arrangements but within the current environment I don't see how this can be achieved.
- I think Customer Relations explored it but it hasn't been necessary so far
- I have great flexibility within my role, as I am trained to work in the call centre, face-to-face at the front counter, and tasks such as social media and administration, and also have the opportunity to work at different office locations.

**Being the face of Council, would you like opportunity for flexible working arrangements?**

- I believe flexible working arrangement would be a good idea for me personally in regards to mental health and having that physical break away from customers. However it would also be important to keep in mind how it will affect others.
- I do find that being on reception there is a limit to the flexibility of working hours – ie office needs to be open from 8.30am to 5pm – so part time days seems to be as flexible as it can get but school hours would be the ultimate as I have two children who I need to arrange care for after school while I'm at work.
- As per question 4



- 
- I believe if I ever needed my hours to be flexible, there would be a way to make this happen – we have a great team. But yes, it would be nice to have something more flexible put in place.
  - I think flexibility is very important as it allows employees to feel valued and can increase work value and I believe in my workplace I am offered flexibility and this is appreciated and makes me want to work harder.
  - Yes! Being able to work school hours would be incredible.
  - N/A
  - I am someone that does need flexible working arrangements, but in the future it might be something I become interested in.
  - Yes. I think we have a large enough team and it would work well just as it did during COVID. I personally think working from home on admin is often more productive as a result of no phones or customers interrupting
  - Yes - I would love to continue my flexible working arrangements if possible, we have the possibility with working part time but not working from home. Would be good to have the flexibility of even working from home.
  - Yes - I am currently working part time and this works really well.
  - Yes - Work life balance is important and supports you being able to do your job more effectively
  - I would love that opportunity.
  - I am happy to work at work, just do not want to contact centre to go back to how it was with too many people in a small space. I found this very noisy and found it hard to concentrate on calls.
  - I do think that all staff should have the ability to have flexibility with in the workplace, albeit that it may only be used occasionally. Given that we are a small front facing team and there is a requirement to have the core hours covered this could be difficult, I am happy with the current working arrangements that are in place.
  - I would like the opportunity for flexible working arrangements but understand the nature of our role and the fact that we have limited staff prevents this.
  - Yes, but I would not like my hours, wages or conditions to be impacted by such arrangements
  - I'm fine coming into work 😊
  - given the current climate, having the option to be given the software/ facilities to work from home would be a great benefit to some. I am content with my current situation as I have lots of variety at work.





## Appendix 3 – CEO Survey Questions

### 1. Are you for or against a 4 day work week?

- Against For indoor, would trial construction for outside
- We will shortly be surveying all staff, via Organisational Development, on Work/Life Balance. As a part of that survey I expect we will be asking staff for views on work life balance and ideas for consideration . Introduction of a 4 day work week is not black and white. There is a need to look at the functional areas. Are the relevant staff customer facing? Need to take the view that if something like that is implemented then the arrangements can be reversed if it doesn't work out. The approach taken now is that 4 days (0.8) is part time and if a role can be performed in 4 days then it is a part time role. Our service ethos as an organisation is that we will offer a service over what might be regarded as general business hours over a 5/7 day week
- Happy with this for some roles
- Assuming this actually means either 38hrs spread over 4 days or people working & being paid at .8. The questions really is how does this effect the 3 key elements: The customers experience, Productivity and what we are now more commonly calling the people (staff) experience.
- If we can maintain or improve on these then it's a no brainer. IT is likely to mean in man areas though that everyone doesn't get the same days off (ie Monday or Friday) as this results in a significant lost opportunity in terms of capital utilisation (plant machinery office space), as well as reduced responsiveness and customer experience,. If we can spread the workforce over 5 (or maybe even 6 or 7 days) then that offers real advantages for our community and potentially the staff – but it's a big shift and our industrial relations systems typically get in the way of this type of flexibility rather than supporting the potential improvements.

### 2. What do you feel your community's perception would be if your LGA were to change to a 4 day work week?

- It may work for the outside workforce during daylight savings, due to efficiency gains in Travel plant and equipment, The community would slam us if indoor staff were offered the same
- The expectation would be that if staff work a 4 day week, then they would be paid for a 4 day week. Service delivery is the issue. The community would /should not be concerned as long as the service delivery remains across a the usual business hours during the week .
- Service would deteriorate, hence it would need to only be certain roles or rostering changes


- we can achieve ticks in the boxes of the 3 elements as described above then it should be all positive. If we can use this to broaden the spread of time when council is available to respond to enquires, deal with works, work around peak traffic times more effectively there are advantages all round. Some will have an initial perception issue but if we can demonstrate that we are providing improved service that can be batted away very easily.

### **3. What opportunities do you see resulting from greater work/life flexibility?**

- A wider range of candidates
- There are a multitude of opportunities. There are employee benefits which flow on to their personal lives and families. Greater work / life flexibility says that, if the employer is empathetic to staff's needs then there is more opportunity for staff to provide contemporary delivery of service to the community. COVID19 has shown us that we have the ability to deliver to the community using digital means as an example. COVID provided work from home which had a positive impact on many employees. How you manage something like ongoing work from home is another matter. There will always be some employees who could be seen as abusing the system and this would be managed like any other functional difficulty. In this regard, I think the organisation has many opportunities to facilitate greater work life balance and to this end I believe flexi time is useful.
- Better, more productive staff, employer of choice
- Probably covered much of this in answers above. But from a people / staff it should allow for greater choice to fit in with our personal lives – picking kids up, getting to sporting proactive in daylight hours, looking after parents its really just a flexibility thing. The 4 days per week is just one option that's part of a much broader range of flexibility options.

### **4. What threats do you see resulting from greater work/life flexibility?**

- Customer service, the public expect public servants to be available
- No threats per se. If the opportunity is provided, then you need to manage the community expectation and an equitable process for enabling the employees to access it – herein lies the individual circumstances of the employee and the organisation functional needs being matched and aligned . An unintended consequence could lead to winding arrangements back.
- Customer service / reputation as a result of different working hours
- In reality few. In implementation some pain. Change is never easy, its made more possible through a good open relationship and trust between all of us in the workplace.
- As an example as we've found with inside staff through Covid that have been working remotely some managers and supervisors initially found this hard as they felt they



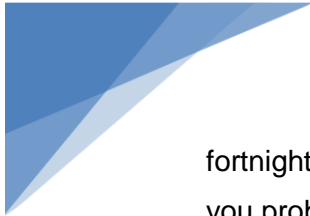
couldn't supervise as well remotely. In part that's doing things differently and in part its trust. The people that are taking advantage of the situation were probably goofing off when we were in an office environment anyway! It's all about managing performance rather than anything else.

- As also mentioned above our IR system is based on defined rules and this works against flexibility so its a threat to the success of us being more progressive on this front.
- 5. Are there any work/life initiatives that could result in cost saving? If so, could this be passed onto the ratepayer?**

- Outdoor staff for construction of roads, needs a trial to put a \$\$ value on the savings, if any
- There would be a reduction in employment costs with a 4 day week, which would result in a reinvestment of that saving into the community. There are a raft of flow on effects re a healthy workforce – reduce personal leave / more alert employees/ energy etc in the workforce . Also I think it opens the possibility up for greater sharing of external experiences back into the workforce and thereby enhance the richness of ones work life - Yes for sure on both fronts! A healthier and more balanced life should result in our staff feeling less compromised (we all have those conflicts between work and family husband / wife kids time pressures) which creates stress and often results in people taking sick or family leave to manage those commitments or pressure. So that could reduce and that would make happier people and less absenteeism – increased productivity. If we had good flexibility we could use plant and office space across a greater span of time. There's 168 hours in a week, we currently work a pattern of about 38 hours per week. If you think about an office building or a truck or other piece of plant that means at very best its used 22% of the time and sits idle 78% of the time – its just wasted. While we could never get to 100% we could get to 30 or 35% utilisation by allowing people to work a much broader span of hours – this could improve customer service markedly. It could also mean we need less office space, less trucks/plant as they are used across a greater spread of the available 168 hours. Obviously there are lots of practical constraints but even a small improvement would have good benefits.

**6. What current work/life balances are implemented within your Council?**

- Some flexibility given on individual circumstances, no one size fits all however.
- Many instances of work / life balance are achieved on a case by case basis in agreement with the staff member's manager. Such arrangements result in a bespoke relationship with your employee. Flexibility is provided by allowing staff to work within a band of hours. It's all about how it is managed and ensuring that it fits within the corporate agenda. Flexi time is utilised and can result in the performing of a 9 day



fortnight, while still working full time. However, if you really want to change your lifestyle, you probably need to work part time or significant change to working hours – eg alignment with family needs 37.5 hours over 24hr /7 days – such an approach really necessitates how work is undertaken and absolute clarity about deliverables / and how effective collaboration across the org occurs to ensure we are simply not reinforcing project or functional silos. Field services essential can't work from home and so what solutions are available for them as a cohort in our business

- Flexible working, compressed hours, etc by negotiation, working from home, job share
- Some people do have flexibility of hours. Many work 9 day fortnights and we have tried 4 day weeks in the past. Some are working reduced hours as they transition to retirement as that preserves their bodies or assists the psychological transition toward ending work life
- Through Covid we've seen lots of our staff work from remote locations including home and through this many have adopted much more flexible hours. Some for example start at around 6am, work for a few hours. Log off get kids to school then log back on. Others work best later in the day and exercise in the morning then happily work through to 6 or 7pm. We are looking at what flexibility means for our people and have now adopted 5 principles that we are using as a basis for adopting flexible practices going forward. Bearing in mind that different solutions will work for different roles and technology may enable or constrain but we are moving forward on this!

#### Working Flexibly Principles:

1. Customer experience excellence is our commitment.

We will prioritise our customers and the way we treat them, continuing to be responsive to the needs of the business.

2. Connection, communication and collaboration.

We will connect and collaborate effectively without compromising our safety and wellbeing.

3. Trust and flexibility to balance business and individual needs.

Employees and leaders work together and are trusted and supported to make decisions and understand what works best for them and the business.

4. Our success is measured by behaviour and outcomes.

Employees and leaders are accountable and empowered to achieve quality outcomes.

5. Efficient use of resources and value for money.

We consider the cost benefit of any potential changes and make financially sustainable decisions.

- 7. What work/life balance initiatives are currently being explored, but not yet applied?**

- N/A


- Council's Health and Wellbeing agenda is about trying to stimulate activity that hasn't previously been applied. It's a personal thing. What amounts to work / life balance for one person, may not be of interest to another. Sees Work / Life Balance as making time available ( and if necessary across the 7 days) to pursue personal interests or address family responsibilities .
- Further increased flexibility, including weekend working in certain roles
- As above

**8. If you could choose a new initiative without any restrictions to improve work/life balance, what would you choose?**

- Additional leave
- We have good opportunities already.
- Longer council opening hours (into the evenings) and the ability of staff to work throughout the day. Public acceptance that you wouldn't always get someone immediately
- Flexibility of hours.
- I'm really lucky I largely have it but that's a construct of my role. But that said I generally work 50 – 55 hours in a normal week and sometimes for short bursts that can go up to 60 or 65. So I get to manage when that occurs. That isn't what's envisaged or expected for most people so my situation is a bit different. But the principle of being able to influence to some extent where and when I get my work done is pretty empowering and good for my productivity state of mind and family relations!

**9. Given that millennials are looking for employers that offer flexible working conditions, and that from our survey of local government Professionals we surveyed approx 80% were over the age of 40. What strategies do you think will need to be implemented to attract the next generation of workers.**

- Exactly what the survey is asking , having the community accepting that change will be a slow process
- Developmental opportunities. It is valuable for an employee's development to be given the opportunity to experience different roles and industries. Consider how we can facilitate development programs for all employees ; for example, short term placements with business partners. Such opportunities drive an individual's development, making them employable across multiple industries or through doing or working on such things as social or non monetary based initiatives which have value to the individual .- lectures/ mentoring/ training sessions for skills e.g. mens shed
- Selling the public value and vocational offering of local government and of working close to the community.

- 
- Local Government is in a really interesting space on this issue. We offer exactly what most millennials are looking for – a job with purpose. Not just looking to make money for shareholders. But a job that makes a difference to community, to the environment, to society, to people's lives and that deals with tough and tricky problems.
  - What works against us is our public perception that is to a great extent driven by media and those that are ill informed and have never either worked in a council or taken the time to understand what we do. So we need to address that public perception. We also need to adopt all of the above more explicitly – flexibility (and purpose) is what they are crying out for. In terms of that flexibility what I think they are really looking for is a sense of autonomy – give us a challenging task that's got a clear and meaningful purpose and let us go about it in the best way we can – Wow that sounds exactly like the work environment most people (and millennials especially) want to be part of.