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NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

18th March, 2021 at 7.00 p.m.

Present

Councillors Abel, Barber, Barfield, Beasant, Bramley, Brookes, Cairns, Callison, Cracknell, Fenty, Freeston, Furneaux, Goodwin, Green, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Hyldon-King, Jackson, James, Lindley, Mickleburgh, Nichols, Parkinson, Patrick, Pettigrew, Procter, Rodwell, Rogers, Rudd, Shepherd, Sheridan, Shreeve, Silvester, K Swinburn, S Swinburn, Watson, Wheatley, Wilson and Woodward.

Officers in Attendance:

- Rob Walsh (Joint Chief Executive)
- Joanne Hewson (Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director People, Health and Care)
- Simon Jones (Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets and Monitoring Officer)
- Sharon Wroot (Executive Director Environment, Economy and Resources)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)
- Paul Wisken (Civic and Mayoral Officer)

NEL.127 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL

There being a vacancy for the position of Chair of the Council, nominations were sought for the appointment of the Chair of the Council for the remainder of the current Municipal Year. It was moved by Councillor Jackson and seconded by Councillor Shreeve that Councillor Hasthorpe be appointed as Chair of North East Lincolnshire Council for the remainder of the 2020/21 Municipal Year. There being no further nominations, this was put to the vote. Councillor Wilson requested that his abstention be recorded in the minutes.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Hasthorpe be appointed as Chair of North East Lincolnshire Council for the remainder of the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

COUNCILLOR HASTHORPE IN THE CHAIR

NEL.128 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed all those present to this meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council with all Members in virtual attendance. The Chair thanked the retiring Members, Councillors Barfield, Fenty, Hyldon-King and James (and also recently resigned former Councillors Nici and Walker) for their valued contribution to the work of this Council and their service to the community of North East Lincolnshire.

He invited the Monitoring Officer to advise on protocols to be followed at this meeting.

NEL.129 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence from this meeting had been received.

NEL.130 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Rogers declared a personal interest in any matters arising from the minutes of Cabinet and Committees of the Council relating to the North East Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group, as an employee of that organisation.

Councillor Rodwell declared a personal interest in any matters arising from the minutes of Cabinet and Committees of the Council relating to Navigo, as an employee of that organisation.

NEL.131 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of North East Lincolnshire Council held on 17th December 2020 and the 18th February 2021, and the special meeting of Council on 14th January 2021 were approved as a correct record.

NEL.132 THE LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Council received a statement from the Leader of the Council.

The Leader noted that it had now been a year since the first pandemic lockdown and he thanked elected members, the council's workforce and partners for all that they had done to meet the demands of the pandemic. Although the pandemic was still with us, there was now light at the end of the tunnel with 65,000 first dose vaccines having now been administered in North East Lincolnshire; a significant achievement and important progress. This was translating into a clear downward trend in hospital admissions and less COVID-related deaths in the elderly population. There was also increased testing being undertaken. The local infection rate had recently risen, owing to factors including workplace and care setting outbreaks and because of increased testing in schools. He thanked all those who had worked tirelessly to successfully and safely bring about the return to school, which he felt was vital for our children's education and their future. The Leader noted the need to continue to be vigilant and assiduously follow the

hands-face-space guidance. Cabinet members were working with key officers to constantly review the approach to slowing the spread of the virus, including risk assessing the resort of Cleethorpes. Easter bank holiday weekend was likely to be an important test for all concerned, not just locally, and he urged people and businesses to continue to be cautious, vigilant and responsible.

The Leader reported that, despite the pandemic, there had still been a huge amount of progress in other areas, especially regeneration and economic development. It had been confirmed that North East Lincolnshire had been successful in obtaining £17.3 million of Future High Street Fund grant towards the repurposing of the western end of Freshney Place. This was a competitive bidding process, and we received the seventh highest award of the 101 bids that went in. There was more good news for North East Lincolnshire in the Budget, with the announcement in principle of almost £21 million of Towns Fund monies for the seven key projects featured in the Grimsby Town Centre Masterplan. Work continued on the ground, with public realm improvements in St James Square, Garth Lane and Riverhead Square. The new bridge would arrive next week for installation across the River Freshney and this was certainly a very exciting time for Grimsby Town Centre. Indeed, over the last year, North East Lincolnshire has received almost £45 million of grant funding for regeneration works. This showed the confidence that Government had in this administration and their ongoing commitment to levelling up. North East Lincolnshire would also be eligible to submit bids against three further funds announced in the Budget: the Levelling Up Fund, the Shared Prosperity Fund and Community Renewal Fund. Once again, Cabinet and officers were working up appropriate bids and there would be further information in due course. The final Budget announcement was the success of the Humber Freeport bid, subject to the submission of a full business case. This offered the prospect of being transformational for the Humber ports, attracting millions of pounds of private sectors investment and thousands of new jobs, including further support in principle for our South Humber Inward Investment Programme. The government also announced £75 million of grant to develop the Able Marine Energy Park, which bordered North East Lincolnshire and could provide up to 1500 new jobs.

The Leader highlighted progress that had continued with several important highway schemes. Tollbar roundabout safety and capacity improvements had been completed on time and within budget. The new roundabout at the junction of Littlecoates Road and Cambridge Road was operational, though some resurfacing and landscaping works remained to be completed. Work on the A1173 at Stallingborough was complete and the new Humber Link Road was fully open, providing access to more industrial land as well as reducing travelling distances and times and transport cost for local businesses. The permanent closure of the Scartho Road bus lane had also been confirmed.

The Leader noted that, earlier this month, revised arrangements for the collection of recycled domestic waste had been introduced, following the roll-out of the new recycling bins. More plastics could now be recycled, and recycling rates were increasing. He commented that the new arrangements had been well received,

and the council was working with residents to ensure early resolution of any teething problems.

Turning to health and wellbeing, the Leader commented on the Government's Integrated Care White Paper, which signalled the biggest NHS re-organisation since 2012. The implications for our current Council and Clinical Commissioning Group Union arrangements were currently being reviewed but the administration was determined to grasp the opportunity for the Council to lead the shaping and development of the local health and care system, working with all providers to tackle the wider determinants of health and address health inequalities for the benefit of all our residents.

It was noted that details of special urgency decisions taken in accordance with the Constitution and an update on the implementation of Motions previously resolved at the preceding Council meetings, would be circulated to Elected Members after this meeting.

NEL.133 QUESTION TIME

There had been no questions submitted by members of the public for this meeting.

NEL.134 PAY POLICY 2021/22

The Council considered a report from the Leader of the Council presenting the pay policy statement for the period 2021/22. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 10th February, 2021 and the recommendations were referred to Council for approval.

The Council sought clarification over whether a previous commitment to implement the Living Wage was being followed, as the report appeared to indicate otherwise. Amendments were proposed to ensure that this was the case. Consideration of this item was deferred to allow clarification to be provided. The Monitoring Officer later clarified that the council had implemented a policy to pay the national Living Wage and that all council employees, with the exception of those at maintained schools, would see the benefit of that from April, 2021. On that basis, the proposers of the amendments agreed to withdraw their amendment.

RESOLVED – That the pay policy statement for the period 2021/22 be approved.

NEL.135 BARNOLDBY LE BECK COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Council received a report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets presenting the outcome of a statutory consultation on a request from Barnoldby le Beck Parish Council for North East Lincolnshire Council to conduct a community governance review with regard to increasing the number of councillors on the parish council from five to six.

RESOLVED –

1. That the responses received to the initial consultation period, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report now submitted, be received and noted.
2. That the following draft recommendations be agreed, in respect of Barnoldby Le Beck Parish Council community governance review:
 - To increase the number of parish councillors from five to six
 - To implement the change with effect from the next parish council elections in May 2023 to coincide with the rest of the parish council elections in North East Lincolnshire.
 - That the parish council remain unwarded.
3. That authority be delegated to the Electoral Registration Officer to consult on the draft recommendations in resolution 2 above, in accordance with the terms of reference and the timetable set out for the community governance review, which was approved by Council on 17 December 2020.
4. That the final decision on the outcome of the review be reserved for Full Council in accordance with legislation.

NEL.136 GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE JOINT STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

This Council considered a report from the Leader of the Council seeking approval to form a joint committee with Lincolnshire County Council and North Lincolnshire Council. This report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on the 9th December 2020 and the recommendations were referred to Council for approval. The decision of Cabinet was called-in by two Members of the Council and subsequently considered by the Economy Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 12th January, 2021. The panel released Cabinet's decision for implementation and forwarding to full Council.

RESOLVED –

1. That the creation of a joint committee, the Greater Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Oversight Committee, to explore strategic issues and alignment of opportunities across Greater Lincolnshire be supported and authorised.
2. That the Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and with the support of the Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer, to settle terms of reference and governance arrangements around the proposed committee.

NEL.137 NOTICE OF MOTION

The Council considered a Notice of Motion, proposed by Councillor Patrick and seconded by Councillor Wilson, submitted in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders as set out below:

Council will note that in the December of 2020, a news story broke that shook the reputation of the administration of North East Lincolnshire Council to the core.

The local newspaper, the Grimsby Telegraph, highlighted a business relationship between a convicted fraudster, Alex May and Councillor Fenty, whilst Councillor Fenty was the portfolio holder for regeneration on North East Lincolnshire Council.

Despite public speculation that this issue could have developed into a potential conflict of interest, Councillor Fenty retained his portfolio duties at that time, and did not disclose these facts.

Further to this, Alex May had, with others, had direct access to council officials, and it is unclear as to if there was a relationship disclosed between Councillor Fenty and Mr May at this time that might have made this inappropriate in the eyes of the public.

These events could risk our council being brought into disrepute, with speculation running rife amongst the general public about what this has revealed about the culture within the current council Cabinet.

Despite the welcome and much needed resignation of Councillor Fenty from his Cabinet position, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jackson, who appointed Councillor Fenty, despite protests from opposition members, has failed to either act decisively in the public interest over events, or be seen to do so.

Councillor Jackson has failed in his duty to uphold the integrity of his office, failed to meet the standard of conduct expected by residents, and moreover, has allowed his Cabinet to risk being seen to breach the Nolan principles of office.

This council concludes that Councillor Jackson's position as council leader is untenable, as not only does the leader and his Cabinet need to be beyond reproach but needs to be seen to be beyond reproach.

This council no longer has confidence in Councillor Jackson to continue as leader, and removes him with immediate effect from his office, to allow a new leader to be appointed, as per the rules of this council's constitution.

The motion was debated, during which Councillor Woodward moved the closure motion "that the vote be put". The Chair dismissed this as he felt that there had been insufficient debate at the time. Following further debate, Councillor Woodward again moved the closure motion "that the vote be put". This was seconded by Councillor Abel, and the Mayor put this closure motion to the vote. A recorded vote was requested in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

For the motion

Councillors Abel, Barber, Brookes, Cairns, Callison, Cracknell, Fenty, Freeston, Furneaux, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Jackson, James, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Procter, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K. Swinburn, S. Swinburn and Woodward (24 votes).

Against the motion

Councillors Barfield, Beasant, Bramley, Goodwin, Green, Hyldon-King, Mickleburgh, Nichols, Patrick, Rodwell, Rogers, Rudd, Sheridan, Watson, Wheatley and Wilson (16 votes).

The closure motion was declared carried and Councillor Patrick's motion was put to the vote. A recorded vote was held in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders. The votes cast were recorded as follows:

RESOLVED –

For the motion

Councillors Barber, Beasant, Bramley, Goodwin, Green, Hyldon-King, Mickleburgh, Nichols, Patrick, Rodwell, Rogers, Rudd, Sheridan, Watson, Wheatley and Wilson (16 votes).

Against the motion

Councillors Abel, Brookes, Cairns, Callison, Cracknell, Fenty, Freeston, Furneaux, Harness, Hasthorpe, Hudson, Jackson, Lindley, Parkinson, Pettigrew, Procter, Shepherd, Shreeve, Silvester, K. Swinburn, S. Swinburn and Woodward (22 votes).

Abstained

Councillors Barfield and James (2 votes).

NEL.138 QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chair invited Councillor Rodwell to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Health, Well Being and Adult Social Care, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“How many excess deaths did care homes in North East Lincolnshire have last year (2020)?”

Councillor Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Health, Well Being and Adult Social Care, responded that, based on our assessment, there were 80 excess deaths in

care home residents during 2020. This was compared with the average number of care home deaths in the years from 2015 to 2019. The data was where COVID-19 was mentioned on the death registration.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Rodwell asked whether the portfolio holder agreed that by its slow initial action and then opening up out of lockdown too soon, together with encouraging get togethers at Christmas, the government had put our community at extra risk.

Councillor Cracknell responded that this had been a very difficult year for those that had contracted COVID-19 and for those families who had not been able to be close to their loved ones in the last days their lives. She acknowledged the controversy nationally, but she felt that we could only follow national public health advice. Locally, we had consistently listened to public health advice and tried our best to put in measures to keep people as safe as possible while also being mindful of the need to keep the economy going.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“Could the Portfolio Holder give his assessment of the financial health of the council, based on the issues that matter to the residents of this borough?”

Councillor Shreeve, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets, responded, firstly, that residents would like to be assured that the council was solvent and would not run out of cash. The financial health of the council was monitored on an ongoing basis and reported through the quarterly monitoring reports. In terms of the revenue position, we were projecting a balanced position in 2020/21 and 2021/22, thereafter there were gaps to fill. Cashflows were monitored on an ongoing basis.

Secondly, residents would want to know that there were sufficient funds to maintain services. Environment, refuse and highways services were fully funded and programmes were running to budget. There were demand pressures in a range of services and trajectories were properly factored into future budget forecasts.

Thirdly, residents would like to know why they were having to pay more council tax next year. Whilst the government has supported the council with a range of financial support packages for both businesses and individuals, we are still living with high levels of uncertainty going forward and the further impact of COVID on Council finances was unabated. Whilst levels of reserves were stable, they were barely adequate for an authority of our size. The collection rates (business rates and council tax) were being consistently monitored and reported through quarterly monitoring also. The rates had been impacted by COVID19 and acknowledged within the recent budget refresh.

Finally, residents would want independent assurance about our finances and external audit had provided the Council with an unqualified value for money opinion which encompassed their view of the Council's financial sustainability and overall arrangements in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In a supplementary question, Council Patrick asked given spiralling debts, maximum hikes in council tax year on year, and a £5m black hole within its finance, why the portfolio holder had lost control of the council's finance so quickly.

Councillor Shreeve responded that there was no £5m black-hole and nor were there spiralling debts. He noted that they had inherited £110m of debt from the previous administration and while that had increased to £150m over the last two to three years, it was based on fully costed commercially-based capital investment. He added that the council's borrowing was within prudential limits. Therefore, he did not feel that he had lost control of the council's finances.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the question to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

"The continuity of the Labour plan to introduce recycling bins over boxes has been welcomed by the public, however, what has not been as welcome is the chaotic change to the scheduling service, which not only has left residents confused about the new system but has also resulted in overflowing bins in windy weather making our streets look, as one resident put it 'like a dog's breakfast'.

Whilst we all can acknowledge that change to the system was needed, this chaotic failure shows that not only was this plan rushed in a bid to chase political points but was also a complete breach of the Tory manifesto pledge to introduce weekly recycling, indeed it is now stripped to a monthly service.

Will the Portfolio Holder do the decent thing, and unreservedly apologise for this calamity and inability to stick by his parties promises?"

Councillor S Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, responded that as the council was changing both the number of crews and type of vehicles used to collect waste, new rounds had been designed for both general household waste and recycling. They were planned by a specialist company that took data (including every address we collect from, the distances vehicles need to cover, the amount and frequency of waste and recycling collected, the types of street, and other details), and worked out the most efficient way to run them. Changes to collection dates had been widely publicised since the introduction of the new recycling bins in July 2020. Information about changes to collection dates for both bins was included in the booklet distributed to households with the new bins, the leaflet delivered before Christmas and the calendar booklets sent to households in February. Presentations had been offered to all members, as well as parish councils, for each stage of the project to help keep everyone informed of the changes ahead.

In addition, the changes had been publicised by local media such as Radio Humberside and the Grimsby Telegraph. The changes were also being advertised on our bin lorries and on local commercial radio, digital streaming channels and social media. In all messages we were advising people that bin days were changing, and they could check their dates online. Over 37,000 individuals had used our online bin calendar since 15th February 2021, which was well over half of all households. Considering the magnitude of the change on nearly 75,000 households, he was pleased to report that only 16 reports of concerns had been received from residents since February 2021, which had all received a response and resolution.

With the introduction of the changes, there had been a one-off change in frequency for some households. Some had gained a week and had a weekly collection for first two weeks, most would either gain or lose a few days and some would need to wait an extra week. For the averaged sized household this should be fine, as most domestic bins were not full after fortnightly collections. Most green bins were about 60 to 75 per cent full after two-weeks. Waste crews were monitoring the waste volumes and had reported very few issues. There had not been any reports of negative impact on the street scene as a result of the changes; instead the change from boxes to bins had reduced the presence of windblown litter on collection days and made it easier for our street cleansing team to ensure streets remained clean. If residents had additional side waste because of the changes in collection day, this had been collected by crews in the first two weeks of the change.

An extensive waste strategy consultation had been completed in January 2020 and achieved a record number of responses from residents. The administration had listened to the views of residents and the changes introduced had been what people told us they wanted to see. This had substantially increased the recycling volume available for residents and we had received 25% more recycling in February 2021 than we did in 2020.

Councillor S Swinburn commented that he would not apologise for the success achieved by this administration with the new format of the waste strategy.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired whether, rather than hiring expensive consultants, the portfolio holder would have been better off talking to local residents.

Councillor S Swinburn responded that the administration had listened to people and taken advice. He repeated that only 16 people had commented on the changes to date.

The Chair invited Councillor Patrick to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder for Health, Well Being and Adult Social Care, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

“Despite the continued hard work of keyworkers and volunteers, North East Lincolnshire has seen an increase in the rate of COVID-19 infections locally against the national trend, what has gone wrong?”

Councillor Cracknell responded that there had been a rise in infection rates during the second week of this month, which was associated with a significant outbreak in a food processing factory, supermarket staff and school-age children. All positive infections were of the most infectious Kent variant. Infection rates were high in October and early November 2020 but there was a substantial reduction in late November and December 2020. Furthermore, we then had the lowest infection rate for top tier authorities in England for several weeks in early 2021. It would appear that industrial settings, where people are unable to work from home, were contributing to the rates of infection. In addressing scrutiny the previous day, the Deputy Director of Public Health was confident that the figures would decrease and there had been no significant outbreaks in the last 10 days.

In a supplementary question, Councill Patrick asked whether it would be prudent for this Council to avoid being seen to invite people from out of area into the borough, except for valid reasons, until the COVID pandemic was finally over.

Councillor Cracknell responded that it was always a difficult decision to strike the right balance between keeping people safe and allowing the economy to recover. Bearing in mind the forthcoming Easter holidays and the government’s roadmap, she remained confident that, as a council, we were doing our best to put appropriate measures in place to achieve the correct balance.

The Chair invited Councillor Beasant to present the following question to the Portfolio Holder Environment and Transport, the question having been submitted on notice in accordance with Council’s Standing Orders.

“Residents at a number of locations on the East Marsh are struggling to cope with both recycling and household waste due to the size of the communal bins. Therefore, will the Portfolio Holder commit to a review of both the household waste facilities and recycling facilities at the following locations: Orchard Drive, St Luke’s and St Francis Courts, Bedford Street Flats, Bath Street Flats and the Low Rise Flats?”

Councillor S Swinburn responded that the Council operated a uniform waste and recycling offer, with all households being offered the same average collection capacity for both household waste and recycling. The shared waste and recycling sites in the locations listed were designed to provide 240 litres of household waste capacity and 240 litres of recycling capacity per fortnight, for each household they serve. Waste Services were happy to carry out site visits to all of the listed locations to ensure they still delivered the agreed capacity and occupiers were receiving the same service as other residents across the Borough. The service was also working closely with Lincolnshire Housing Partnership and Longhurst to ensure enclosures were secure and actively managed to deter fly tipping and provide regular cleaning.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Beasant felt that this was clearly not working and he asked the portfolio holder if he would review the situation.

Councillor S Swinburn agreed to raise this with relevant officers and ask them to make contact with Councillor Beasant.

NEL.139 MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 9TH DECEMBER, 2020

At minute CB.75 (Calculation of Council Tax Base), Councillor Patrick noted the reduction in the discount for the council tax support scheme to 65% and asked for the name of any agencies that were supportive of this change.

Councillor Shreeve responded that there was no change in the support for the coming year.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick noted that the impact of the reduction, which was postponed from last year, would only have been felt by residents this year. He again asked for any examples of agencies that were supportive of this change.

Councillor Shreeve confirmed that the move to a 65% discount commenced for the 2019/20 financial year and was being maintained for 2021/22.

At minute CB.73 (Europarc Bus Service), Councillor Hyldon-King enquired what plans would be put in place for funding when the existing subsidy ran out on 31st March, 2022.

Councillor S Swinburn responded that funding was in place up to 2022 and this would be regularly monitored to identify other opportunities that may become available. He added that the Europarc bus bridge was now at planning approval stage and the council was waiting for notification of any funding opportunities.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Hyldon-King enquired whether the Emergency Active Travel Fund could be utilised for this.

Councillor S Swinburn confirmed that any opportunities, including this, would be considered.

On the same minute, Councillor Wilson enquired whether the portfolio holder had held any discussions with officers about the possibility of submitting a bid as part of the government's new proposals for funding for public transport.

Councillor S Swinburn confirmed that all opportunities were discussed and, for example, he noted that a bid had been submitted for the electrification of buses, although this had unfortunately been unsuccessful.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson enquired whether the portfolio holder was aware of the latest government initiatives on funding.

Councillor S Swinburn confirmed that he was aware of all funding that was available for highways issues and all opportunities for improvements to the highways and travel infrastructure were being looked at.

The minutes of the above meeting were moved by Councillor Jackson and seconded by Councillor Shreeve.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 9th December, 2020 be approved and adopted.

NEL.140 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Councillor Patrick moved that the Council's Standing Orders governing the length of meetings be suspended to permit this meeting to continue beyond 10.00 p.m. This was seconded by Councillor Green. Upon a show of hands, the motion was lost.

NEL.141 MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 13th JANUARY, 2021

At minute CB.83 (Family Hubs Review), Councillor Patrick enquired whether before this decision was made, what consideration had been given to the operating of the family hubs in a post-COVID world.

Councillor Lindley, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Skills, responded that there had been a lot of discussions on the findings of the review but it was recognised that they were not being used to the degree they should have been in certain areas. It was apparent that some rationalisation was required. He added that during the pandemic, the four hubs that had opened had functioned admirably. He was confident that, post-pandemic, services would continue to run effectively.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired whether any consideration had been given to the opportunity for the hubs to be given a new lease of life.

Councillor Lindley noted that the review was due to take place under the previous administration. It was about good housekeeping and he confirmed that there would be no reduction in service.

On the same minute, Councillor Hyldon-King enquired why two children's centres in her ward were being closed.

Councillor Lindley responded that no services were being withdrawn and it was proposed to retain a hub within each of the four locality areas in the borough. He noted that there would be further engagement on the proposals and he had provided a commitment to take the outcome of this to scrutiny.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Hyldon-King enquired why there was no consultation with members.

Councillor Lindley acknowledged that scrutiny should have been consulted earlier but gave a commitment to listen to members when the outcome of the engagement was reported back to scrutiny.

On the same minute, Councillor Rodwell asked the portfolio holder whether he agreed that the family hubs shouldn't be just for those that need it but there as a community asset.

Councillor Lindley responded that the review had established that some of the hubs were not being used to support families and a lot of the usage was by community groups. While social activities were important, the context for setting up the hubs was to support families.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Rodwell enquired whether the portfolio holder did not think that socialising was valuable to communities in building confidence and supporting mental health.

Councillor Lindley appreciated the value of looking after our most valuable families and children. The hubs were not intended as meeting spaces.

On the same minute, Councillor Wilson enquired how the equalities report on this matter influenced the final decision.

Councillor Lindley responded that there were a lot of factors that were taken into account when the decision was made and not just equalities.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson asked for a brief overview of the equalities report.

Councillor Lindley agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Wilson.

On the same minute, Councillor Rudd enquired whether the portfolio holder agreed that it was important for communities and families to work together.

Councillor Lindley agreed and noted that community groups did engage with families. He reiterated that there was no reduction in services being offered but they would be delivered in a different way.

On the same minute, Councillor Wilson asked what the average walking distance would be for families who need to access the family hub services.

Councillor Lindley responded that this would vary from area to area but noted the similarity to secondary school provision in that not all wards had a secondary school.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Wilson enquired whether any consideration had been given to walking distances.

Councillor Lindley responded that they had tried to centralise the provision as best as they could.

On the same minute, Councillor Goodwin asked the portfolio holder whether he believed in communities working together.

Councillor Lindley reiterated that community groups were valued but the hubs were there for families and not the exclusive use of community groups.

On the same minute, Councillor Patrick asked whether holding a consultation after the decision had been taken was the equivalent of executing someone and having the trial afterwards.

Councillor Lindley noted that it was an engagement process and he repeated the commitment to take the outcome back to scrutiny.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Patrick enquired why it took a call-in to get this matter to scrutiny and whether it was an attempt to bury the issue.

At this point the meeting concluded with all remaining business deferred to a future meeting of Council to take place after this year's elections.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 10.00 p.m.