



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on the 18th March 2021

SPECIAL CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

16th February 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:

Councillor Freeston (in the Chair)
Councillors Abel, Cairns, Goodwin, Harness (substitute for K. Swinburn), Rodwell, Rudd, Wheatley and Woodward.

Co-opted Member – Greg Marsden (Non-Voting Lincoln Diocesan Board of Education Representative)

Officers in attendance:

- Joanne Hewson (Deputy Chief Executive)
- Lisa Arthey (Interim Assistant Director Safeguarding and Early Help)
- Matt Clayton (Group Manager Safer Families and Young and Safe) Coordinator)
- Wendy Fisher (Estates and Business Development Manager)
- Jack Fox (Project Manager)
- Paul Windley (Democratic and Scrutiny Team Manager)
- Beverly O'Brien (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)

Also, in attendance:

- Councillor Ian Lindley (Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People)
- Councillor Stan Shreeve (Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets)

SPCLL.51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received for this meeting from Councillor K. Swinburn.

SPCLL.52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

SPCLL.53 CALL IN - FAMILY HUB REVIEW

The panel considered a formal request from members to call-in a decision taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 13th January 2021 in relation to a review of family hub provision. The call-in was proposed by Councillor Patrick and seconded by Councillor Wheatley.

The Chair gave Councillor Patrick the opportunity to give his reasoning behind calling in the Cabinet decision. Councillor Patrick expressed how he was disappointed that it took a call in to be made so that the family hubs review could be discussed by scrutiny. He wanted to ask Members whether it was the right choice to close family hubs in our area. He was horrified to hear that 50% of our family hubs were earmarked for closure. He reminded Members how worthwhile the services provided were to children and families. He believed this was a decision born out of our current Covid world, due to the staff doing so well with remote working. However, he believed communities would need rebuilding post-Covid. Therefore, he asked for Members to consider sending this back to Cabinet to request that a select committee be implemented to allow an open and informed explanation of all the issues involved be talked through with Members, staff and parents and children to find out what impact this may have on their lives and their communities.

The Chair then allowed the seconder of the call in, Councillor Wheatley, to explain why she was supporting calling in this decision of Cabinet. She was concerned that, although the review had started in February 2020, it had not been brought to scrutiny. She believed it was important to have all the information before this decision was released. She felt that all options had not been explored and if they had been, they should have been included within the Cabinet report. This had been presented as having an impact on buildings rather than services and it not being the building that delivered the service, but they do allow families to access them easily. It would leave Immingham with no service and Cleethorpes would only have one to use. Councillor Wheatley stated that it was unnecessary tinkering with a service area that had already been through enough changes. She felt that to review something during a pandemic was outrageous and to remove a service like this could cause more issues. She added that an informative review could not have taken place whilst the service was not open, but as Members have not seen the full review document, they were not aware of what has been done. Therefore, she concluded that a select committee would allow them to look at all the options and hear everyone's opinions. She hoped members of the panel would support this.

The Chair then gave both the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets the chance to respond to both members around the decision of the family hubs review.

Councillor Lindley stated that it was unfortunate that this had come to scrutiny as a call in. The hubs all closed in March 2020 due to Covid 19

after government directive was given. Since this time, the local authority has managed to deal with over 1000 cases by using just four hubs. He explained that before the pandemic some hubs were being underused, some were not being used at all and some were being used but not for what they were initially intended for. He also added that there was never any intention to close nursery provision. Whilst he could understand where members were coming from, he explained that if you were to look in detail at the six remaining hubs it would show how they would absorb the demand and need. The six that were proposed to be closed were not being utilised to their full potential. Councillor Lindley stated that it was unfortunate that it had not come to scrutiny, but members need to recognise that it was a piece of work that needed to move forward. He reassured members that children and families would still be able to access services in areas that had a higher demand.

Councillor Shreeve stated that the paper described what was going to happen. There had been a multi-agency group that had developed the outcome of these proposals and that it was not about service provision, it was about utilisation of buildings. Alternative arrangements were being developed and our highly skilled teams would still be able to provide a great service.

The Chair thanked Members for their proposals and views. He opened the debate up to panel members for any questions they had. Members asked for the definition of the 'super hub' that was referred to in the report. They also asked how the hubs due to be closed had been chosen and how they would provide provision in Immingham if the hub was to close there. Ms Arthey explained that they were not necessarily a super hub, but services would incorporate children centres where a whole range of services would sit. She added that a whole rationalisation of each family hub had been undertaken where they had looked at the demand of each hub and the need for someone being present at buildings where the communities were not accessing them. Mr Clayton added that there were numerous opportunities to provide this service in Immingham. The option was to incorporate services within Oasis Academy, Immingham and their intention was to use other accommodation where possible and in no way would services be diminished. One Member had a follow up question on whether any investment would be made in hubs that were being kept open. Ms Arthey confirmed that no initial investment would be made, but if anything were to occur this would obviously be considered.

One panel member, supporting the call in, hoped the hubs of the future would grow and go back to how they were previously used by the community. People would not want to travel across town to access services like this. A select committee would allow this to be looked at in more detail and allow members to see all the issues being raised by members of the public.

Another panel member stated that currently not all wards had their own family hub, and therefore there were circumstances where individuals

would have to travel to attend such services. They believed that it was always better to have a quality service over a quantity of services across the borough. They asked about the process if the decision was released. They believed that the next step would be that a consultation would take place where families, stakeholders and other members of the public would have the opportunity to share their views. Ms Hewson confirmed that the Cabinet recommendation stated that the next stage would be for full engagement on the proposals. She explained that consultation was required and would have to be part of the local authorities' application to the Secretary of State for these closures.

One panel member sought further clarification on how a 'super hub' would work, especially if they were just going to be in specific wards. They also wondered why the Immingham hub would be removed as it seems that it was still needed. Ms Arthey stated that Officers referred to the need of the service in Immingham as being a need for a community presence and wrapping a range of services around schools would be an option. In terms of the 'super hub' provision, Ms Arthey explained that this was still being developed but, as part of the service delivery model for early help and prevention, the expectation of staff was that they go to families rather than expect families to travel. As part of Covid-19, this had been how the service had been implemented and a broader range of services would be provided as part of the 'super hub' provision.

Members had concerns around mental health after families have had to deal with a lot throughout the pandemic. They asked how would Officers be able to see what issues children and young people may have if services were closed before lockdown had been lifted. They wondered whether Officers could predict the needs of families before early help had been identified. Ms Arthey stated that they did not know the full extent of how families may have been affected by the pandemic, but the local authority had a very robust mental health offer within every school through the mental health in schools initiative. They also had a good partnership with Barnardo's who would be setting up in the East Marsh hub and they would be focusing on children and young people in child protection, children in need and our looked after children. She explained that, through the early help work, referrals could be made and the community was encouraged to share information on any children they may be concerned about. Councillor Lindley understood where Members concerns were coming from, but in terms of delivery they need to recognise that not all these services were being delivered within the hub. Schools and academies were being utilised and Officers were taking services out into the communities.

One member asked how these closures may affect staffing. Ms Arthey confirmed that there would be no redundancies and a more multi-disciplinary model was currently being built.

Councillor Lindley believed the debate had been useful and he agreed on the benefit on having this discussion. He just wanted to clarify that recommendation 1 in the Cabinet report stated that full engagement and

consultation would be taking place if the decision was released for implementation and then following on from that it would come back to scrutiny for further discussion.

Councillor Wheatley reiterated that she was not against the building rationalisation, but for a review to take place now meant that it would be flawed as the service being reviewed was not currently operating at its full capacity. A select committee would be able to speak to service users and staff to give members a better understanding before allowing a decision like this to be implemented.

Councillor Woodward proposed that the decision be released so that the recommended consultation could take place and then scrutinised at a later date. Councillor Abel seconded the proposal.

(The Panel voted 5 for and 4 against the proposal. The proposal was carried).

RESOLVED – That the family hub review Cabinet decision, be released for implementation.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 5.33 p.m.