



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.52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

SPCLL.53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

SPCLL.54 CALL IN - FAMILY HUB REVIEW

The panel considered a formal request from members to call-in a decision of Cabinet. 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 where Family Hubs came from and how worthwhile these services 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, when we get post Covid, he believed communities would need rebuilding. Therefore, he asked for Members to consider sending this back to Cabinet to allow a select committee to be implemented and 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 supported Councillor Patrick's implementation of a select committee to allow Members to understand the implications of this decision. The review started in February 2020 and had not been brought to scrutiny. She believed it was important to have all the information before this decision was released. All options had not been explored and if they had been, they should have been included within the Cabinet report. She stated that she knew it would be presented that services would not be affected and it's not the building that delivers the service, but they 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. The argument stating that Hubs have been closed due to Covid was scary. To review something during a pandemic was outrageous. 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. They 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 can 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 have 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. He echoed what Councillor Lindley said in terms of it not coming to scrutiny before now, but he believed that it was best for the decision to be released.

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 a 'Super Hub'. They stated that the report referred to a 'Super Hub' and wondered what that entailed. They also asked how the hubs chosen were chosen to close 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 options was to incorporate services within Oasis Academy 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 on 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 Member supported the call in. They believed that to get rid of something was a big decision. They hoped the Hubs of the future would grow and go back to how they used to be used by the community. People will not want to travel across town to services like this. If we do not support a select committee then this would not be looked at in more

detail and members won't be able to see all these issues that members of the public have shared with them.

Another member stated that currently not all wards have their own Family Hub, 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 service 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 Member asked 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 there 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 has been how the service has been implemented and part of the 'Super Hub' provision it would mean having a broader range of services being provided.

Members had concerns around mental health after families have had to deal with a lot throughout the pandemic. Without these services how would Officers be able to see what issues children and young may have if services were closed before lockdown has been lifted. They wondered whether Officers could predict the needs of families before early help had been identified. Ms Arthey stated that they do not know the full extent of how families may have been affected by the pandemic, but the local authority has a very robust mental health offer within every school through mental health in school's initiative. They also have 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 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 were currently building a more multi-disciplinary model.

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 means that it would be flawed as the service being reviewed was not currently operating at its fully 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 can 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.