

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 3rd March, 2026

10.00 am

**Council Chamber, Sessions House, County
Hall, Maidstone**





AGENDA

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 3rd March, 2026, at 10.00 am
Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall,
Maidstone

Ask for: **Anna Taylor**
Telephone: **03000 416478**

Membership

Reform UK (7) Mr W Chapman, Mr J Defriend, Mr J Eustace, Mr T Mole,
Mr T L Shonk, Dr G Sturley and Mr D Truder

Liberal Democrat (2): Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair) and Mr A J Hook

Conservative (1): Mrs S Hudson

Labour (1): Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair)

Green (1): Mr M A J Hood

Independent Group
(1): Mr P Thomas

Church
Representatives (3): Mr J Constanti, Mr M Reidy and Mr Q Roper

Parent Governor (2): Ms R Ainslie-Malik and Ms H Carter

County Councillors who are not Members of the Committee but who wish to ask questions at the meeting are asked to notify the Chairman of their questions in advance.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

A - Committee Business

- A1 Apologies and Substitutes
- A2 Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

B - Any items called-in

- B1 Call-in of Decision 25/00104 - Future of Library Provision in Folkestone Town Centre (Pages 1 - 174)

EXEMPT ITEMS

No items are entirely exempt, however Item B1 includes Exempt reports. Detailed consideration of these may require the meeting to move into exempt session, during which the meeting will not be open to the press and public.

Benjamin Watts
Deputy Chief Executive
03000 416814

Monday, 23 February 2026

By: Joel Cook – Democratic Services Manager

To: Scrutiny Committee – 3 March 2026

Subject: **Call-in of Decision 25/00104 – Future of Library Provision in Folkestone Town Centre**

Summary: This decision, taken on 6 February 2026, has been called-in to the Scrutiny Committee by Mr Prater, Mr Hood, Mr Brady, Ms Hudson, Mr Hook, Mr Samme and Mr Sefton.

Background

1. Decision 25/00104 – Future of Library Provision in Folkestone Town Centre was considered by the [Growth Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee meeting on 13 January 2026](#) prior to the decision being taken by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, on 6 February 2026.
2. Following the decision being taken, the call-in request was submitted by Non-Executive Members from more than one political group.
3. Call-in powers are held by the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. These are intended, under the legislation, to provide an opportunity for non-Executive Members to further scrutinise significant decisions, where the call-in criteria are met, before they are implemented and to recommend reconsideration if deemed appropriate by the Committee.
4. The call-in was duly assessed by Democratic Services, including a review of the reasons given by those Members calling in the decision and an investigation into whether all issues raised in the call-in were adequately addressed by the decision documentation, committee reports, responses to written questions or committee debate. The results of this review were considered by the Democratic Services Manager and the call-in was determined to be valid under the call-in arrangements set out in the Constitution. Call-in reasons must be clear, correct and align to one or more of the following criteria under s17.67 of the Constitution:

Members can call-in a decision for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) The decision is not in line with the Council's Policy Framework,
- (b) The decision is not in accordance with the Council's Budget,
- (c) The decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision making set out in 8.5, and/or
- (d) The decision was not taken in accordance with the arrangements set out in Section 12.

5. The full call-in request is set out in Appendix A, as submitted by the relevant Members. Some elements of the call-in did not meet the criteria – this recognises that the decision documentation is extensive and to a significant degree articulated the significant activity and work undertaken to develop, investigate and progress the options outlined in the reports. It should also be recognised that this decision is built upon a foundation [established through Key Decision 24/00116](#) and the overall position represents an extensive KCC programme demonstrating a great deal of professional due diligence, option appraisal and engagement with Members.
6. Discussion of the proposals at Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee on 13 January allowed for the consideration of a range of key issues relating to the decision by Members and the details of that debate were taken into account as part of the call-in validity review.
7. While not all elements of the call-in were valid, a range of points or themes set out within the call-in did meet the criteria. These are summarised below:

Reason one: 8.5 Due consultation

- While the decision and committee discussion did set out consideration of the historic consultation activity for the 2025 decision, which included confirmation that the Council’s likely intentions were to exit the Grace Hill in terms of building responsibility, there is limited consideration of to what extent the specific building, its location and history, should inform the future library arrangements and this was significant feedback point in terms of public and Member consultation and engagement.

Reason two: 8.5 A presumption in favour of openness and an explanation of the options considered and giving reasons for decisions.

- The decision documentation and Cabinet Committee discussion indicated that Community bids were assessed based on initial submission with limited scope for revision and the addressing gaps. In addition, there was a lack of clarity around the consideration of any negotiation or exploration of responsibility for long term maintenance costs which are relevant to the timing element of the Executive argument for pursuing a disposal outcome.
- The focus of the consideration of options and the justification for the final decision is Infrastructure focused, with limited explicit articulation of consideration of the community benefit and Library Service opportunities which are material to KCC’s Library Service duties and Best Value duties.

Process

8. In determining the validity of any call-in, no judgement is made by Democratic Services as to whether the decision itself is flawed, inappropriate or improper. The review found that there is scope to explore some elements further to secure appropriate assurance that the decision took account of required information and the reasoning is clear. In accordance with the call-in arrangements, it is for the Scrutiny

Committee to determine whether any recommendations should be made to the Executive and if any reconsideration of the decision is necessary or appropriate.

9. While the wider points within the call-in are not entirely out of scope, the Committee should focus its consideration, debate and attention on the points recognised as valid within the call-in arrangements, as detailed under paragraph 7 of this report when coming to any resolution.
10. The Cabinet Member, or nominated representative, and relevant Officers will attend the Scrutiny Committee to present their response to the call-in and to respond to questions.
11. The Scrutiny Committee should consider the reasons set out by the Members calling-in the decision, the documentation available and the response from the Executive given at the meeting, giving due regard to the information made available during questioning and discussion on this item. For clarity, the decision under consideration has been taken – call-in prevents implementation but does not reset or cancel the taking of the original decision.
12. The Scrutiny Committee has a range of options in terms of responding to the call-in. The specific options are set out in the Recommendation section of this report. It will be for members of the Committee, having debated and reviewed the decision, to propose and second an appropriate resolution from that list of options. The Chair of the Committee will set out how this will be approached during the meeting to ensure appropriate debate and due consideration of the issues before any resolutions are sought.
13. It is important to confirm that the Scrutiny Committee has no power to override or prevent the decision being progressed – it may formally resolve comments about the decision or the manner in which it was taken and make relevant recommendations to the Executive. These provide a public record of suggestions for improvement or criticisms of an approach to support learning and avoiding of prior mistakes in the future. If significant concerns about the decision-making remain after consideration by the Committee, it may refer the decision for reconsideration by the Decision-maker. Implementation of the decision will remain paused until after the decision-maker has reconsidered – the decision-maker may choose to confirm their decision and move to implementation if they so wish at that point.
14. The Committee also has the option to refer the decision to Full Council; however, this is option is intended for use only in the most extreme cases where there are significant concerns of improper decision-making, financial non-compliance or clear departure from the Strategic Statement without reasonable justification. Full Council may, if concerns persist after review, refer the decision back to the decision-maker or Cabinet for review.
15. The original decision papers remain [available online](#) but are republished in the agenda pack as appendices for ease of reference.

Recommendation – Options for the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee may:

- a) make no comments
- b) express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision
- c) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the decision-maker in light of the Committee's comments; or
- d) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council.

Appendices

- a) Scrutiny call-in reasons submitted by Mr Prater, Mr Hood, Mr Brady, Ms Hudson, Mr Hook, Mr Samme and Mr Sefton
- b) 25/0104 - Record of Decision
- c) 25-00104 - Decision Report
- d) Jan 2025 Decision report
- e) Jan 2025 Record of Decision
- f) Exempt – Folkestone Library Community Proposal
- g) 25/00104 – Decision Report Appendix D1 report
- h) Exempt - 25/00104 – Decision report Appendix D2 report
- i) 25-00104 – Equality Impact Assessment (Folkestone)
- j) 25-00104 – Sandgate Road Equality Impact Assessment

Background documents

- a) Recent Cabinet Committee reports
[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Growth, Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee, 13/01/2026 10:00](#)

- b) Previous Decision (January 2025)
[Decision - 24/00116 - The future of library provision in Folkestone town centre](#)

[Choose agenda document pack - Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee 22 January 2025](#)

Contact Details

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Call-in request submitted by: Mr Prater, Mr Hood, Mr Brady, Ms Hudson, Mr Hook, Mr Samme and Mr Sefton.

Reasons for calling in the decision:

Reason one: 8.5 Due consultation

The consultation feedback from users of the Grace Hill Library made clear that more than half of respondents disagreed with leaving the Grace Hill building for an alternative town centre location. Many consultees expressed a strong preference for repairing and retaining the existing building, and several specifically referenced Creative Folkestone when outlining their views. This decision raises serious concerns about the value and purpose of conducting a consultation if the Council chooses to proceed with a decision that appears to disregard or directly contradict the views of residents and local representatives.

Under the Council's Best Value obligations, the Council is required to 'take account of feedback from citizens and service users', and ensure that service delivery is evidence-based, customer and citizen focused.¹ Public interest in keeping the library at Grace Hill is further reflected in the EQIA, which shows that between April and November 2022, Folkestone Library had the highest visitor numbers in the area, attracting 50,675 residents—significantly more than Hythe, which ranked the second-highest, with 38,399 visitors. As the Best Value Duty requires consideration for 'efficiency and effectiveness,' it is reductive to interpret best value solely in financial terms, this duty should also focus on maximising public benefit. Consultation responses, petitions, strong community engagement, and the objections raised by Folkestone's MP Tony Vaughan demonstrate that the Grace Hill building holds substantial value for the community. If a solution could be found to retain the building as a library, whether operated by KCC or an alternative provider, this would more accurately reflect the Best Value principles.

The decision taken does not meaningfully consider the consultation or other methods of evaluating the Council's Best Value duty. The approach taken for this decision gives the impression of a predetermined decision, undermining the voices of Kent residents. For these reasons, the decision should be subject to further scrutiny, ensuring Members have a genuine opportunity to consider and respond to the consultation findings.

Reason two: 8.5 A presumption in favour of openness and an explanation of the options considered and giving reasons for decisions.

The decision report for Decision 25/00104 does not include the reserve auction price for Grace Hill building and despite direct requests, this information has not been made available to Members through either public, exempt papers, or discussions. Members must be provided the full financial information for this decision, as the Council's budget is a collective responsibility and meaningful scrutiny cannot be provided for decisions when essential cost information is withheld. Additionally, this decision has not been considered by the Policy and Resources Committee, which implies that the proposed auction reserve price for this Grade II listed building is below £1 million. An explanation and evidence of this

¹ Gov.UK (8th May 2024), 'Best value standards and intervention: a statutory guide for best value authorities'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-value-standards-and-intervention-a-statutory-guide-for-best-value-authorities/best-value-standards-and-intervention-a-statutory-guide-for-best-value-authorities#defining-best-value>

evaluation must be provided to Members, particularly as an urgent decision was recently required for the disposal of the former Gravesend Adult Education Centre. This was due to this building exceeding the auction reserve price and selling for £1,523,000. The lack of clarity regarding the valuation of Grace Hill, including the reserve price and the methodology used to determine these evaluations, creates a real risk of repeating the same errors. A conservative reserve price, combined with insufficient scrutiny due to a lack of information, could once again necessitate an urgent decision which could undermine confidence in the Council's asset disposal processes. Given the building's importance to the Folkestone community, Members must ensure that such mistakes are not repeated and that no decision to sell is made until all relevant information is available and fully justified.

Further clarity is also required regarding the decision to operate from 14 Sandgate Road. While the report emphasises the financial challenges of remaining at Grace Hill, it fails to provide a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the full costs of operating from 14 Sandgate Road. This is particularly important as Grace Hill is a centrally located Grade II listed building, which if repaired could provide a stronger long-term financial investment for the Council. This comparative information should be presented to Members for consideration to provide confidence in both the decision and the decision-making process for Members and Kent residents. This is particularly important following the recent announcement by the Culture Secretary that funding will be available for cultural organisations to save them from closure and to restore national pride in community assets. Included in this funding is £27.5 million allocated for Libraries Improvement Fund which supports public libraries to upgrade their buildings, and £75 million which provides grants towards the repairs and conservation of historic buildings.² To dispose of an asset without fully exploring the potential of grant funding does not demonstrate best value for the Kent taxpayer, especially as this could improve the assets worth.

Within the decision report, Option 2A is highlighted as being in line with the consultation feedback, with some respondents specifically referring to Creative Folkestone. This report acknowledges that this option remains subject to ongoing engagement, and that Creative Folkestone has expressed a willingness to enter a legal arrangement that would end the Council's responsibility for repairs and maintenance. Furthermore, exploring Option 2A is complimentary to decisions taken to date as 14 Sandgate Road has only been leased and has a 5-year break clause on commercial terms. If an agreement could be reached to retain and refurbish Grace Hill at no cost to KCC, the library service could return to the site in 2030, with long-term costs agreed in advance. This would provide certainty and protect against future market cost fluctuations. Therefore, engaging further with Option 2A could financially benefit the Council while also meeting the clear preferences of the Folkestone residents who use this service.

This option should also be explored further as it is clear from the option appraisal that not all the necessary information was requested or obtained from Creative Folkestone to allow for a full assessment. Despite Creative Folkestone's proactive efforts to engage, KCC did not take meaningful steps to discuss or negotiate key aspects of the community bid, including the terms, lease arrangements, peppercorn provisions, or associated liabilities. The paperwork provided for this decision does not demonstrate that Creative Folkestone could not lease the building, only that insufficient information was gathered to make an informed judgement. The potential of Option 2A was not thoroughly investigated. Moreover, Creative Folkestone was the sole respondent when the building was marketed, and there

² GOV.UK (21st January 2026), *Government announces bumper £1.5 billion package to restore national pride*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-bumper-15-billion-package-to-restore-national-pride>

appears to be no reasonable justification why further discussion and engagement could not have taken place before its dismissal. In spite of the verbal reassurances provided in Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee and commitments made by KCC to Creative Folkestone and the individuals involved in the bid, there has been limited contact by KCC with Creative Folkestone, the District Council and the local MP following the ACV bid process. Members need assurance that the Council has meaningfully explored all possibilities with Creative Folkestone and their One Folkestone community partners, especially as their proposal made clear their desire to reach an agreement with the Council which would best meet the needs of the Council and the community.

Additionally, we understand that Folkestone Town Council has recently submitted a bid to purchase Grace Hill for a nominal sum, which would relieve KCC of the ongoing costs associated with maintaining the building. This represents new information that is not contained within the decision report and has not yet been fully considered. It is therefore necessary to pause the decision until all potential options, including this one, have been thoroughly explored and discussed.

Overall, this decision is unsafe and characterised by significant uncertainty as key financial details are absent, and the documentation indicates that KCC has not gathered or provided adequate information to make a confident decision. For these reasons, the decision should not proceed without further scrutiny, more complete information provided, and renewed efforts to explore viable alternatives that align with both community priorities and the Council's financial responsibilities.

Desired outcome of this call-in:

We request that the Scrutiny Committee recommends that the implementation of the decision be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council.

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services

DECISION NUMBER:

25/00104

Executive Decision – key

25/00104 - The future of library provision in Folkestone Town Centre and the next steps for the 2 Grace Hill building

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Community & Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Deputy Leader, I agree to

- Reaffirm the Council's commitment to delivering a sustainable, comprehensive town-centre Library and Registration Service in Folkestone.
- Note the outcome of the 2 Grace Hill Asset of Community Value and marketing process, including the outcome of the KCC evaluation of Creative Folkestone's proposal alongside other options for the library service.
- Confirm 14 Sandgate Road as the location of the Folkestone town centre Library and Registration service for the foreseeable future.
- Confirm that the Council remains open to considering the location of the library service as part of its ongoing estates management best practice. With the next review now likely to take place in late 2028.
- Confirm that the Council will progress with open market disposal of the Grace Hill building.
- Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure, in liaison with the Deputy Leader, to finalise terms and enter contracts necessary to implement the decision regarding the Grace Hill building and the Sandgate Road building.

Reasons for decision:

A Key decision is needed to confirm the long-term location of Folkestone Library in the town and to determine the future of the 2 Grace Hill building.

Financial implications:

Works are already specified and budgeted to convert the building to facilitate its temporary use as a library per decision 24/00116. Some additional capital expenditure may be required to upgrade provision if it is confirmed at any future point as the permanent Library and Registration facility in the town. The building will operate within existing revenue budgets allocated to the co-locating services.

There is a need to dispose of the Grace Hill building if an alternative town centre site is selected. The disposal of the Grace Hill building will generate a capital receipt for reinvestment back into the Council's adopted capital priorities, it will also reduce

revenue expenditure holding the building vacant which is projected to cost over £100k pa

Legal implications:

Kent County Council (KCC) must provide a comprehensive and efficient library service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The temporary library at Sandgate Road is considered to meet this statutory requirement.

The Council will engage qualified legal professionals, coordinated by the Office of General Counsel, to implement the decision regarding Folkestone Library.

Because the Grace Hill building is listed as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), Kent County Council must follow legal steps before selling or leasing it, including notifying the local authority and allowing community groups time to bid. There are set moratorium periods (6 weeks, then 6 months if a group is interested) during which no sale can happen. After this, the Council can proceed with disposal but must still get the best financial value for the asset.

Under s123 of the Local Government Act 1972, KCC must obtain the best financial consideration when disposing of surplus property assets, including leases over seven years.

Equalities implications:

Moving the library away from Grace Hill could increase the distance for some users, particularly those in deprived areas or with mobility challenges. However, the new location at 14 Sandgate Road is just 0.2 miles away and offers open, level access from the High Street, which improves accessibility for most users.

KCC is committed to providing a full town centre library service for everyone, including children and those with protected characteristics. The EQIAs support the recommendation that the new site will not disadvantage these groups.

The Council has considered feedback from consultations and taken steps to ensure that any negative impacts are minimised, such as ensuring ground floor access and co-locating services for convenience.

The EQIAs are part of a continuous process. KCC will keep monitoring the impact of the decision and remains open to further adjustments if needed.

Data Protection implications:

None

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The proposed decision was considered by the Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 13 January 2026.

The Cabinet Member noted the views expressed by the local member and does not consider they conflict with the decision he is taking. The views expressed are in respect of disposal methodology and contractual arrangements which are matters

delegated to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader. Those with the disposal delegations will have regard to the local member's views as part of subsequent decision taking processes.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library until and if it has become possible to finalise terms and agree to occupy FOLCA with FHDC.

Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library while the Council works to establish an alternative town centre library site which is not FOLCA or 14 Sandgate Road.

Confirm that the Council will accept Creative Folkestone's proposal to work towards an alternative grant-funded vision for the Grace Hill building which may include the provision of space for the library service, and until this point in time the temporary library will operate at 14 Sandgate Road.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None



06.02.2026

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Signed

Date

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From: Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth Environment and Transport

To: Paul Webb, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

Subject: The future of library provision in Folkestone Town Centre and the next steps for the 2 Grace Hill building

Decision no: 25/00104

Key Decision: Yes, affects more than 2 Electoral Division and Involves Significant Service Development

Classification: Part Exempt – Appendices C and D

Electoral Division: All divisions within Folkestone and Hythe district

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This paper follows the previous Cabinet Member’s decision (24/00116) taken in January 2025 and sets out next steps and timescales in respect of the Library and Registration service provision in Folkestone town centre and the future of the 2 Grace Hill building (the “Grace Hill building” throughout).

It sets out: the current position in respect of the Grace Hill building and the temporary library provision at 14 Sandgate Road; reviews the remaining options; and confirms next steps to ensure that Folkestone town centre has a sustainable, deliverable, and comprehensive statutory Library and Registration service.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services is asked to agree the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (PRoD) (Appendix A).

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 *‘to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who live, work or study in the area’*.
- 1.2. Folkestone Library is part of the Council’s statutory network of Libraries which deliver services across the County. It operated at the 2 Grace Hill building (referred throughout as the “Grace Hill building”) until December 2022 when it was temporarily closed due to building condition issues including water ingress and mould, rendering it unsafe for occupation by staff and customers.
- 1.3. Since this temporary closure the Council has undertaken steps to mitigate the impact and to identify options for the future of the town centre library service in Folkestone.

- 1.4. An interim decision 24/00116 was taken in January 2025 outlining next steps and options which remained under consideration.
- 1.5. Due to the progress made since January 2025 the Council is now able to take a further decision on next steps in relation to the future of the Folkestone Library service and the Grace Hill building, and the timings associated with these.

2. **Background**

- 2.1. Until the temporary closure of the Grace Hill building in December 2022, a comprehensive library and registration service was offered from this location including book lending service, access to local studies collections, public computers and registration functions.
- 2.2. Due to the extent of condition issues, it was not considered economically viable for the Council to carry out the necessary works to allow the building to safely reopen, and an exercise was commenced to fully cost the level of capital expenditure required. These costs were later established to be c£2.9m, which continues to be an accurate reflection of the level of capital expenditure required to reopen the building.
- 2.3. The nature of the Council's financial challenges, and the controls in place to manage spend across Council, mean that limited property maintenance budgets are prioritised towards buildings which are used to provide the Council's welfare related services.
- 2.4. In 2022 the total estimated cost of repairs needed to the Grace Hill building would have represented over a third of the Council's total 22/23 FY annual property maintenance budget.
- 2.5. Since this point in time the pressure on the Council's property maintenance budgets has continued to increase and it remains clear that such costs cannot be justified.
- 2.6. While the Grace Hill building has been closed, temporary service provision has been put in place for service users and local residents to access a library and registration service which consists of:
 - Town centre access to the local history collections and public computers at 'Folkestone Library – Heritage and Digital Access' operating at 5 Grace Hill. This also includes a free library book (and other materials) borrowing and reservation service.
 - Extended branch opening at nearby Wood Avenue and Hythe libraries.
 - Additional public computers and an additional location where public can complete birth and death registration appointments at Wood Avenue Library.
 - Promotion of other ways to access free library services via online, the Mobile Library and the Home Library Service

- 2.7. At the point of drafting this paper, Folkestone town centre has been without a full town centre library and registration service for three years.
- 2.8. Following the temporary closure, the Council has explored various options for the future provision of the service. An eight-week public consultation took place in 2024 which outlined the options at the time and the basis of the criteria that would be used to assess options, the outcome of which was reported to the Cabinet Committee and Cabinet Member in January 2025.
- 2.9. The subsequent key decision confirmed which options were discounted, and which would continue to be developed.
- 2.10. Some limited capital works were undertaken in the 25/26 financial year to the Grace Hill building to improve the roof drainage network in consultation with the Conservation Officer at Folkestone and Hythe District Council. These works were designed to stabilise the building's condition and slow further deterioration of the internal heritage fabric of the building, to provide additional time for options analysis and decision taking over the 25/26 winter period.
- 2.11. The interim decision (24/00116) taken by the Cabinet Member on 22nd January 2025 recognised the consultees' views and agreed that further work be undertaken to explore the two remaining options, with all other options outlined in the papers being discounted.
- 2.12. The **discounted options** in January 2025 were:
- Continue with temporary provision (5 Grace Hill) permanently and exit the Grace Hill Building. This option would not meet the service requirements due to spatial limitations and a clear message from the consultation feedback was that people wanted to see either the re-opening of the library at the Grace Hill building or the service moved to a single alternative location.
 - Make repairs to the Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library and co-locate with other services there. While recognising consultees' views about the Grace Building, it was not considered that making the necessary repairs to the building was financially justifiable.
 - Relocate the library service to another existing KCC building. There was no significant support within consultation responses for a move to any existing KCC building in Folkestone and from a review of KCC buildings there was no suitable KCC space available which made this option deliverable.
- 2.13. The **remaining options** in January 2025 were:
- Selling or issuing a long lease of the Grace Hill building to another party and then leasing back part of the building. This option would enable KCC to relinquish its interest in and responsibility for maintenance and repair of the Grace Hill building, whilst retaining the library and registration service at the Grace Hill building. This option is the subject of ongoing engagement with Creative Folkestone. This option may also involve the consideration of proposals from other individuals or groups, should any such proposals be made (including through the ACV process).

- To exit the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the LRA service.
- The decision authorised officers to continue to explore other alternative town centre locations (including continued exploration of the FOLCA option with FHDC) and to look at the options for improved temporary provision while the Council took forward work on a remaining options.

2.14. The principal parts of the 2025 decision were that the following steps were approved:

- That further work be undertaken to explore and implement an alternative town centre location for the temporary library and registration service, from which a greater range of services could be delivered, within current budgets, until a permanent library and registration service location is opened in the town centre.
- That the options for the future of the Grace Hill building which involve KCC retaining responsibility for maintenance and repair of the building, be discounted, acknowledging that this will very likely require KCC to make a disposal of the building to a third party (by way of freehold transfer or grant of a long lease), and progress actions relating to its listing as an asset of community value (ACV), including issuing a notice to Folkestone & Hythe District Council of intention to dispose (Folkestone & Hythe District Council being the statutory body that administers the ACV process under the Localism Act 2011)
- That further work be undertaken on the two remaining options, including further engagement with Creative Folkestone and, if appropriate, other individuals or groups who may make proposals for the Grace Hill building (including through the ACV process).

2.15. While the above summarises the considerations and outcome of key decision 24/00116 the full details of the decision are set out within the paper taken to Committee in January 2025 and as Appendix B.

2.16. The Grace Hill building is listed as an asset of community value (ACV) under relevant provisions of the Localism Act 2011. The Council therefore cannot enter into a “relevant disposal” of the building unless a number of statutory conditions are met.

2.17. A relevant disposal is a sale of the freehold estate of the land or the grant of a leasehold interest with a term of over 25 years.

2.18. The January 2025 key decision authorised officers to trigger the notification of intent to dispose in respect of the Grace Hill building, and progress to openly market the site. This was designed to enable all interested parties, including community groups, to develop and submit proposals for consideration.

2.19. The key decision acknowledged that both remaining options would take time to investigate and ultimately deliver, therefore certain measures were necessary:

- The carrying out of limited capital works to the Grace Hill building to slow the deterioration of internal heritage fabric.
- The establishment of a new single temporary library in the town centre which would be capable of providing the full range of services expected of a town centre Library and Registration facility.

2.20. The above steps have been progressed since the January 2025 key decision.

2.21. Marketing of the Grace Hill building took place for a 12-week period, concluding on 31st October 2025. Following the conclusion of this, and the evaluation of other options, the Council is now able to take a decision which sets out next steps and timescales in respect of the Folkestone Library and registration service and the Grace Hill building.

3. Status of 2 Grace Hill building and ACV / Marketing process

- 3.1. The Grace Hill building remains closed on condition grounds and is managed as part of the Council's vacant property estate – with regular monitoring visits being undertaken and security management in place.
- 3.2. A programme of works to the roof and rainwater drainage network were undertaken in 2025 as permitted under listed building consent (24/1768/FH). These works were developed in close liaison with Folkestone and Hythe District Council's Conservation Officer. Works were limited to improving the capacity and design of elements of the roof rainwater network to reduce the risk of further water ingress from the roof, and improved access to the roof to allow more regular monitoring.
- 3.3. These limited works were not sufficient to allow the building to return to operational use, and significant condition works would still be required to allow the building to reopen to staff and visitors.
- 3.4. The full cost of necessary works was estimated to be in the region of £2.9m in 2024. Due to further deterioration in the building's condition this figure is still considered to be a realistic reflection of the capital investment required for the building to be reoccupied.
- 3.5. Following key decision 24/00116, notification was served on Folkestone and Hythe District Council of the County Council's intention to dispose of the building per the Asset of Community Value (ACV) legislation. As outlined in the key decision this was considered necessary as all remaining options involved a 'relevant disposal' per the legislation.
- 3.6. The ACV legislation does not confer a right of first refusal to community groups, nor does it define how marketing must take place; it provides groups additional time to prepare to bid for assets, alongside other interested parties, which have been nominated and adopted as being of "community value".
- 3.7. Once an asset owner notifies the local authority, in this case the District Council, of an intention to dispose of an asset an initial 6-week moratorium is triggered, during which no disposal can take place. If any qualifying community

group expresses an interest in bidding during the initial 6-week moratorium it automatically extends the moratorium to 6-months. During a moratorium no relevant disposals can take place.

- 3.8. Once the moratorium process ends the asset enters a 'protected period' during which disposal can take place without the need to renotify the District Council of an intention to dispose. This protected period runs for 18-months from the point of the initial notification to the local authority.
- 3.9. Per the legislation, qualifying community groups were given an initial 6-week period in which to express an interest in bidding for the Grace Hill building. This commenced on 7th March 2025.
- 3.10. Three community organisations expressed an interest in preparing a bid for the Grace Hill building, this triggered the full 6-month moratorium to come into effect.
- 3.11. This full moratorium period concluded on 7th September 2025.
- 3.12. While they were not one of the three groups who expressed an interest in developing a bid as part of the ACV process, Creative Folkestone's interest in the Grace Hill building and future of the Folkestone library service is documented in paperwork supporting key decision 24/00116.
- 3.13. Regular engagement with Creative Folkestone and other community groups has continued to take place since.
- 3.14. While not required under the ACV legislation, open marketing of the Grace Hill building was considered necessary to allow all parties interested in developing a proposal to be treated equally and the process to be handled transparently. This was an active decision by the Council to go beyond the requirements of the legislation in the interests of ensuring parity.
- 3.15. Kent County Council wrote to all groups who put forward an Expression of Interest as part of the ACV process and to Creative Folkestone in July 2025 outlining next steps, the details of the open marketing process, and the criteria by which the Council would assess bids and encouraged bidders to contact KCC if further information was needed to help them prepare their bids.
- 3.16. The Council continued to engage directly, and via its appointed agents, with any interested party during the marketing process, offering relevant information on the building, facilitating site visits, and clarifying service requirements. This included meetings with Creative Folkestone in addition to information being supplied to support their proposal drafting.
- 3.17. The open marketing period was supported by news articles, adverts, and external boards on the building to ensure that any and all interested parties were aware of the opportunity to develop a bid.
- 3.18. The open marketing process concluded on 31st October 2025. This represents a period of over seven months from the notification of intention to dispose to

Folkestone and Hythe District Council, and over nine months from the point that the Council confirmed next steps in the January 2025 key decision.

3.19. Only one proposal, submitted by Creative Folkestone and framed around a shared partnership vision, was received during the marketing process. The full details of this are set out in an exempt appendix C. Officer analysis of options are also included at exempt appendix D.

3.20. The Creative Folkestone proposal as submitted includes:

- A joint partnership approach between Creative Folkestone and other community groups to integrate the building into Creative Folkestone's Creative Campus initiative and restore the building as a multi-use cultural hub.
- Acknowledgement of the significant condition issues with the Grace Hill building and an indicated intention to raise c£6.5m from external grant funding sources towards works to the Grace Hill building, as part of a wider c£10m package of grant seeking to support the Creative Campus Project. Potential grant funders are indicated in addition to references to positive engagement to date.
- The proposal did not set out detail of proposed ownership structure for the Grace Hill building but indicated a willingness to abide by the limitations set in 24/00116 around the Council's ongoing maintenance obligations.
- The Council is requested to join a partnership of various groups and allow a period of 18 months in order for the partnership to raise required funds.
- Once repaired and refurbished it is envisaged that the building could be occupied by the library service on the Ground Floor, and creative / community uses elsewhere.
- That Creative Folkestone take the lead role in ongoing management of the building, and that each user would make contribution to the running costs of the building to ensure financial sustainability and manage ongoing risk.
- That the areas of the building other than ground floor would be fragmented to provide individual studio and community spaces.
- A high-level revenue model is set out on the basis of a 90% occupancy assumption, and assumptions on rental rates for areas of the building. However, it is not clear whether these rates would be achievable in the context of more fragmented / ad hoc hireable spaces.
- The alignment of the proposal with various policy initiatives is highlighted, along with potential economic/employment benefits of the wider campus proposal.

4. Update on 14 Sandgate Road, enhanced temporary library provision 24/00116

- 4.1. Key decision 24/00116 accepted that all future options which remained would take significant time to deliver, whether this was disposing of the Grace Hill building to another party to carry out necessary repairs and refurbishment or procuring an alternative town centre library building and conversion works. Therefore, it was considered necessary to deliver a further temporary provision within the town centre, which could provide a single, full and comprehensive Library and Registration service.
- 4.2. No suitable venues were identified within the Council's existing estate. A market search for options was therefore conducted.
- 4.3. The ground floor of 14 Sandgate Road (Sandgate Road building) was identified due to its location within the town centre, good accessibility, and spatial adequacy for not just the Library and Registration service, but other Council services which required a town centre presence in Folkestone i.e. Adult Education. The County Council seeks to co-locate services where feasible.
- 4.4. An interest in the Sandgate Road building has been secured within existing revenue budget constraints allocated to the co-locating services. It has been confirmed that Adult Education service will locate here when the building is ready.
- 4.5. Proposals for the conversion of the space to serve the needs of co-locating services have been agreed, and planning consent has been obtained for the temporary change of use for community purposes for an initial five-year period under consent FH/25/1711.
- 4.6. Conversion works have been tendered per the Council's procurement arrangements, and conversion works are due to commence in January 2026, with completion scheduled for Spring 2026.
- 4.7. Once open the building will allow for a full and comprehensive Libraries and Registration service to be delivered within the town centre; it will also be occupied by the Council's Adult Education function, with ancillary office and storage functionality.
- 4.8. Due to the temporary nature of Library and Registration service's occupation in the building, fitout will be achieved through use of existing furniture stock sourced from closed sites across the County with some new furniture where needed.

5. Status of FOLCA

- 5.1. During the 2024 consultation the Council's preferred approach was to exit the Grace Hill building and relocate to another Town Centre site. At the time the FOLCA project being delivered by Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC) was considered to be the most likely option for a future venue, and at time of the public consultation was KCC's preferred option.
- 5.2. The FOLCA building is owned by Folkestone & Hythe District Council, a former Debenhams store made up of 2 distinct buildings, one fronting onto Bouverie Place (FOLCA 1) and the other onto Sandgate Road (FOLCA 2).

5.3. FHDC decided in July 2025 to dispose of its interest in the Bouverie Place fronting building, FOLCA 1, due to viability challenges with its proposed use. A decision to progress a mixed-use scheme for FOLCA 2 is anticipated in early 2026 as part of a proposed which may be “fully commercial or a combination of public sector, medical and commercial uses.”

5.4. Based on recent communications FHDC have confirmed that:

- FHDC’s preference, as outlined in KCC’s decision in January 2025, remains for the library service to be reinstated at Grace Hill building and FHDC supports Creative Folkestone’s proposal for the building and service.
- Should Kent County Council rule out the Grace Hill building then FOLCA 2 may provide an alternative town centre location which could meet service requirements subject to further clarification.
- Autumn 2028 is a realistic timeline for construction works to have concluded and space to become available in the FOLCA building.

6. **Critical Success Factors and Key Considerations**

6.1. The Council established criteria within the 2024 consultation which set out the approach to appraising options for the future of the library service:

6.2. **Service requirements:** Does the option meet the Library, Registration and Archive (LRA) service requirements? These requirements are covered in more detail below:

- **Location:** It is important to be somewhere really visible and accessible, which is why high-street locations will generally be our preference as this is where most people will go or be able to get to. Libraries can also play an important part in wider high-street regeneration. As a rule, we want to be in a location that lots of people will naturally pass so that we can advertise and be visible for those who are not yet users of the service with the desire that they do become users. Where the best location is in a community may change over time and we should always keep this under review.
- **Space:** We need adequate space to meet service needs and is affordable for KCC.
- **Partnership potential:** The LRA service is in general keen to co-locate with other customer and community services. This brings more services to people in one convenient place but also has the potential to increase the take-up of library and other services for those who don’t currently use them. This has the wider potential to maximise usage of buildings and where possible enable surplus buildings to be released or disposed off where no longer needed which can support revenue budget savings and also generate capital receipts.

6.3. **Financial:** How much will it cost KCC, both in terms of capital and revenue both short and long term? Does the option rely on securing grant funding? If so, what

timescales are associated with this? Will the option generate any income for KCC, given the already-described financial challenge facing the Council?

- 6.4. **Deliverability:** Can the option be delivered and what is the timeline for delivery?
- 6.5. **Environmental:** Does the option reduce the carbon footprint therefore supporting KCC's net zero target?
- 6.6. These criteria continue to be valid for the appraisal of options currently identified. These criteria also formed the basis for the letter sent to community groups who expressed an interest in bidding for the Grace Hill building as part of the Asset of Community Value process.
- 6.7. While the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) does have an impact on how services will be delivered in the future, it is not considered to have a material impact on the current necessary decisions in Folkestone in respect of the library service. As a principal town within Kent it is considered that the need to deliver a comprehensive library service from a town centre location will continue to be a necessity for whichever local government entity inherits statutory responsibilities for the delivery of library services.

7. Options:

- 7.1. At the time of drafting the following remaining options are under consideration. Options 1A-C relate to the progressed option: "To exit the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the LRA service", and option 2A relates to the progressed option: "Selling or issuing a long lease of the Grace Hill building to another party, and then leasing back part of the building":
 - 7.2. **1A) Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in-line with adopted policy. Confirm that, for the foreseeable future, 14 Sandgate Road will provide the library and registration facility in Folkestone town centre.**
1B) Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library until and if it has become possible to finalise terms and agree to occupy FOLCA with FHDC.
1C) Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library while the Council works to establish an alternative town centre library site which is not FOLCA or 14 Sandgate Road.
2A) Confirm that the Council will accept Creative Folkestone's proposal to work towards an alternative grant-funded vision for the Grace Hill building which may include the provision of space for the library service, and until this point in time the temporary library will operate at 14 Sandgate Road.
- 7.3. A detailed appraisal of each of these options is set out in appendix D, with a summary provided below:

- 7.4. **1A) Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in-line with adopted policy. Confirm that, for the foreseeable future, 14 Sandgate Road will provide library and registration facility in Folkestone town centre.**
- 7.5. **Service requirements:** The Sandgate Road building is in the town centre, and works have been specified to ensure the building would be spatially adequate to provide the full remit of library and registration services in this single location. The building's size and location will allow co-location with KCC's Adult Education service and other office-based staff.
- 7.6. **Financial:** Works are already specified and budgeted to convert the building to facilitate its temporary use as a library per decision 24/00116. Some additional capital expenditure may be required to upgrade provision if it is confirmed at any future point as the permanent Library and Registration facility in the town. The building will operate within existing revenue budgets allocated to the co-locating services.
- 7.7. In respect of options 1A-C, all recognise that there is a need to dispose of the Grace Hill building if an alternative town centre site is selected. The disposal of the Grace Hill building will generate a capital receipt for reinvestment back into the Council's adopted capital priorities, it will also reduce revenue expenditure holding the building vacant which is projected to cost over £100k pa.
- 7.8. **Deliverability:** A 15-year interest in the Sandgate Road building has already been secured, and works are currently underway to convert the building for use by co-locating services with a view to completion Spring 2026.
- 7.9. **Environmental:** The building has an EPC-A 25 rating and ensures spatial allocations to services are optimised in line with the Council's Asset Management Strategy which emphasises the need to improve the efficiency of the estate.
- 7.10. **Conclusion:** For the reasons above and set out in appendix D this option is identified as the preferred approach.
- 7.11. The Council will remain open to considering options as part of its ongoing approach to asset management which is set out in detail in subsequent sections of this paper.
- 7.12. **1B) Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library until and if it has become possible to finalise terms and agree to occupy FOLCA with FHDC.**
- 7.13. **Service requirements:** FOLCA is located within the town centre, and it is understood that sufficient space is likely to be available to meet the library and registration service's needs once the project is completed. There is the potential that other public sector services will operate from the building which would be of benefit to service users.

- 7.14. **Financial:** It is understood FHDC's intention is to pursue a Cat A fitout standard. Therefore, the necessary level of capital investment which the Council would need to make into the building is likely to be limited.
- 7.15. Revenue implications are addressed in the exempt appendix. It is projected that it would be less costly to occupy than 2 Grace Hill, but more costly than 14 Sandgate Road.
- 7.16. The financial benefits of exiting the Grace Hill building are outlined under option 1A.
- 7.17. **Deliverability:** It is understood FHDC intend to take further decisions in Q4 2025/26 which will inform the next steps of the FOLCA project. Subject to these, it is understood that it is likely FOLCA will be capable of occupation from Q3 2028/29.
- 7.18. **Environmental:** FHDC has secured support from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund for the development of FOLCA, and this should enable the building to achieve an EPC A rating. Relocation to FOLCA would allow the Council to ensure spatial allocations to the library and registration service were optimised to ensure efficient use of the estate.
- 7.19. **Conclusion:** At present it is premature to confirm the Council's approach to FOLCA occupation, and this option should be discounted. The Council remains open to considering options as part of its ongoing approach to asset management. Should further information become available in respect of space available within the FOLCA building this will be considered in the future as part of the Council's asset review process.
- 7.20. **1C) Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library while the Council works to establish an alternative town centre library site which is not FOLCA or 14 Sandgate Road.**
- 7.21. **Service requirements:** This option would ensure town centre provision, but in the absence of an identified alternative site it is not possible to assess the full service implications. An extensive site search was carried out as part of the identification of the 14 Sandgate Road property which was selected as the most appropriate option for the enhanced temporary library provision. No other suitable available sites were identified.
- 7.22. **Financial:** The financial implications are unknown. But it would be reasonable to assume that alternative town centre venues would be offered on market terms close to those associated with 14 Sandgate Road and FOLCA.
- 7.23. The financial benefits of exiting the Grace Hill building are outlined under option 1A.
- 7.24. **Deliverability:** While it is likely that other town centre opportunities will come forwards it is not possible to estimate the likelihood or timescales attached.

- 7.25. **Environmental:** While this option would allow the Council to ensure the spatial requirements were optimised to ensure efficiency of the estate, the EPC rating of alternative sites is not known.
- 7.26. **Conclusion:** The Council has no rationale for selecting an alternative town centre venue when alternative town centre options under 1A and 1B are better defined. But the Council remains open to considering options as part of its ongoing approach to asset management.
- 7.27. **2A) Confirm that the Council will accept Creative Folkestone's proposal to work towards an alternative grant-funded vision for the Grace Hill building which may include the provision of space for the library service, and until this point in time the temporary library will operate at 14 Sandgate Road.**
- 7.28. As noted earlier in the paper, all three community groups who submitted an Expression Of Interest as part of the ACV process, in addition to Creative Folkestone, were contacted in advance of marketing activity to clearly set out the Council's expectations of the level of detail which would be required to adequately assess any bid based on the criteria formalised as part of the public consultation exercise.
- 7.29. **Service requirements:** The Grace Hill building is the current site of the library service, it is located outside of the immediate town centre, and in closer proximity to more deprived areas of Folkestone. This was highlighted by multiple respondents to the public consultation as a key factor.
- Spatially the proposed area of the ground floor of the building is adequate for the library and registration service, subject to further revisions on layout.
- In terms of partnership potential, the possible co-locating with creative / arts based individuals and organisations aligns with the Council's aspirations for co-located local government and third sector services.
- 7.30. **Financial:** Creative Folkestone's proposal suggests a figure of c£6.5m is needed to repair and reinvent the building as a multi-purpose cultural hub. It is indicated that external grant funding could be secured to fund these works as part of a wider £10m bid towards Creative Folkestone's Creative Campus vision.
- 7.31. The Council has consistently maintained and reiterated in key decision 24/00116 that it would not be in a financial position to make any capital contribution towards the proposal.
- 7.32. The estimated hold costs of the Grace Hill building are c£100k pa. Creative Folkestone have requested an 18-month period in which to secure funding.
- 7.33. Creative Folkestone's proposal signals a willingness to adopt a legal arrangement which complies with 24/00116 in respect of ending the Council's ongoing commitment to repair or maintain the building, however no terms or conditions are outlined in the proposal for the Council to evaluate. Nor is any rent or capital payment outlined which would allow the Council to assess

compliance with its s123 Best Consideration duties under the Local Government Act 1972.

- 7.34. While a high-level revenue model has been supplied with the proposal it is not clear whether the assumptions in the model are deliverable, including a 90% occupancy assumption across the multi-let spaces.
- 7.35. The proposal states that Creative Folkestone would take the lead in managing the ongoing risk and maintenance of the building, however in a scenario where the Council took a lease of the Ground floor it's liabilities would remain through service charge contributions. There is therefore a strong link between the level of capital investment / refurbishment, and the level of service charge liability future occupiers would be exposed to.
- 7.36. **Deliverability:** While the Council recognises Creative Folkestone's highly successful track record of securing funding and delivering artist-led regeneration schemes in the town, there remains significant risk and uncertainty attached to the likelihood that such a significant amount of funding could be raised within the requested 18 month period. The ability to source external funding is intrinsic to the deliverability of the proposal.
- 7.37. The proposal anticipates that the Council will remain exposed to the statutory responsibilities and financial implications of managing the Grace Hill building during the grant seeking period.
- 7.38. **Environmental:** The Grace Hill building is currently rated as an EPC C – 73. The scope to improve this rating will be constrained by the listed nature of the building.
- 7.39. The proposal that the Council reduces its operational footprint within the building is however aligned to estate efficiency aspirations set out in its adopted Asset Management Strategy.
- 7.40. **Conclusion:** In summary the proposal from Creative Folkestone does not align with KCC's key decision in January 2025 with particular regard to clearly demonstrating how the Council relinquishes its ownership and ongoing building maintenance liabilities.
- 7.41. As outlined in this paper, the Grace Hill building suffers from significant condition issues, and the fabric of the building continues to deteriorate. The hold liabilities associated with allowing Creative Folkestone a further 18-month hold period are projected to exceed £100k pa due to the listed nature of the building and its deteriorating condition.
- 7.42. All community groups, including Creative Folkestone, were written to, clearly outlining the information which would be required as part of a bid to enable the Council adequately to appraise the terms and the risks. The proposal received from Creative Folkestone does not sufficiently address the points requested.
- 7.43. The proposal does not set out legal and contractual details, nor does it set out any capital purchase price or rental payment to the Council to enable the Council to assess whether the proposal complies with its adopted approach to

asset management, its best value duties, or its statutory obligations in respect of asset disposals.

- 7.44. Given the Council's current financial situation and its fiduciary duties to all residents of Kent, the Council acknowledges that despite best endeavours it has not been possible to secure any sufficiently certain proposal for the Grace Hill building.
- 7.45. As such, and for the reasons also set out in the attached appendix, it is considered that option 2A does not provide sufficient confidence for the Council to accept the risks associated with the approach. Nor does it ensure that there is a clear plan in place for a sustainable and comprehensive library and registration service in Folkestone town centre. Therefore, for the reasons above, and set out in the appendix, it is discounted.
- 7.46. By proceeding with Option 1A the Council continues to provide Creative Folkestone, or other community groups, with the opportunity to acquire the Grace Hill building transparently via the open market.

8. Opportunity for review

- 8.1. As part of the Council's approach to asset management the Asset Strategy team regularly review upcoming lease break options. For 14 Sandgate Road the first break option for the Council is projected to be in December 2030. The Asset Strategy team typically begin their review 18-24 months in advance of break date to provide adequate time to implement alternative arrangements if these are considered preferential.
- 8.2. Therefore, there is a point in late-2028 during which the Council has a window to consider the future of the Folkestone Town Centre library service, and based on the information provided by stakeholders, this coincides with further information becoming available in respect of FOLCA.
- 8.3. This also provides an opportunity for any future purchaser of the Grace Hill building, who may be minded to independently pursue a mixed occupancy development to make provision for space which could be occupied by the Library and Registration service, for consideration in the future by the Council.
- 8.4. At the time of drafting Folkestone town centre has been without a comprehensive Library and Registration service for three years, and by Q3 2028/29 this will be six years.
- 8.5. It is therefore considered necessary to give the residents of Folkestone comfort that a sustainable and comprehensive Folkestone Library and Registration service is in place by confirming that for the foreseeable future the Sandgate Road building will be used to provide the Library and Registration service, and that KCC remains open to viable and deliverable alternatives as part of its ongoing asset management activities.
- 8.6. The potential late calendar-year 2028 review of options would also allow for a scenario in which Creative Folkestone, or other community groups, could

continue to independently develop community provisions capable of providing alternative space for the library service. This would allow the Council to take an informed view of options in full sight of necessary information.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. The selected option 1A will ensure that the Library and Registration service is delivered from a sustainable premises capable of operating within currently adopted revenue budgetary constraints.
- 9.2. The disposal of the Grace Hill building will generate a capital receipt for reinvestment back into the Council's adopted capital priorities. It will also limit the Council's revenue exposure in respect of holding costs estimated to be in the region of £100k pa.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1. The Council will need to engage suitably qualified legal support to assist with implementation of the decision. This will be arranged through the Council's Office of General Counsel.
- 10.2. Cabinet Committee is asked to note KCC's ongoing statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service' for all those who live, work or study in the area. Officers consider that the enhanced temporary library provision at Sandgate Road Building meets this duty. The proposed decision will ensure that the Council is able to demonstrate its compliance with this duty.
- 10.3. The Committee is also asked to note the legal requirement that KCC gives conscientious consideration to consultation responses. The Council has done so throughout its previous decision making. Committee Members should give careful thought to the analysis of previous consultation responses in this report and appendixes
- 10.4. KCC must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in s. 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Cabinet Members are referred to the Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) at Appendix E.
- 10.5. The statutory requirements relating to the status of the Grace Hill building as an Asset of Community Value are covered above.
- 10.6. The Council has an overarching duty under s123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain best financial consideration in the disposal of surplus property assets. For the purposes of the act, disposal includes the granting of leases more than seven years.

11. Equalities implications

- 11.1. An EqIA has been undertaken for the earlier decision. A further EQIA has also been completed for the further temporary provision on Sandgate Road and both EQIA's are included as Appendix E to this report. The key findings from this support the recommendations of this paper:

- KCC is committed to providing a full town centre library service for everyone. This is restated to mitigate any concerns raised that certain customer groups e.g. children would be disadvantaged.
- There was feedback that any move of the library away from Grace Hill may increase the distance from the immediate area and make the service less accessible for those with age, disability, mat/paternity, or carer protected characteristics in that area. Whilst the immediate location in Grace Hill does have high levels of deprivation, it is considered that a high street location does have the advantages of greater accessibility across the district as a whole. The Sandgate Road building is located 0.2 miles from the Grace Hill building
- 14 Sandgate Road provides open and level access throughout the building from the High Street. The library and Adult Education services can also all be offered and delivered on the ground floor.

12. Data Protection Implications

12.1. There are no direct data protection implications arising from the proposed decision.

13. Governance

13.1 This decision sets out the future of library provision in Folkestone and confirms the strategic position of the Grace Hill site. As a consequence of the service decision, the Grace Hill building is no longer required for operational delivery and will therefore enter the Council's asset management process, including assessment for disposal in line with the Council's Asset Disposal Policy.

13.2 Authority is delegated to officers within the Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate to undertake all operational actions necessary to implement the agreed future library service model in Folkestone.

13.3 Authority is also delegated to the Director of Infrastructure to manage all property related matters arising from this decision, including progressing any relevant disposal activity viable under the Council's Asset Disposal Policy. In exercising this delegation, the Director of Infrastructure will consult with the Deputy Leader on actions involving asset management decisions.

13.4 The decision is to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory services due to direct link to the Library and Registration service provision.

14. Conclusions

14.1. This paper outlines options currently available to the Council in respect of the Folkestone library service, and the risks associated with each. It concludes that the Council does not have sufficient detail to accept Creative Folkestone's proposal for a joint partnership approach despite best endeavours.

- 14.2. Therefore, the paper outlines the preferred option to confirm that 14 Sandgate Road will provide the Library and Registration service in Folkestone town centre for the foreseeable future.
- 14.3. The paper notes that no sufficiently certain option for the retention of the Grace Hill building has come from the Asset of Community Value and open marketing process, and therefore as part of the Council's adopted policies and fiduciary duty to residents, open market disposal will take place in Q4 2025/26 to deliver a capital receipt and minimise revenue hold cost expenditure. This provides Creative Folkestone or other community groups the opportunity to secure an interested in the building under open market conditions and to independently progress their proposals.
- 14.4. The paper notes that as part of the Council's normal asset management activities there will be an opportunity in late 2028 to review future options for the library service which can be compared against continued occupation of 14 Sandgate Road.
- 14.5. Importantly the paper sets out a route forwards which provides confidence to the people of Folkestone that a comprehensive and sustainable Library and Registration service provision will be provided by Spring 2026 and will continue to be in place for the foreseeable future. Ensures compliance with the Council's statutory obligations and alignment with adopted policy, including its Asset Management Strategy. while providing an opportunity for Creative Folkestone, and other community groups to independently pursue options which may provide alternative space for the library service in the future via direct acquisition of the Grace Hill building as part of the Council's disposal process.

15. Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services is asked to agree the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision (PRoD), (Appendix A).

16. Appendices

Appendix A – Proposed Record of Decision

Appendix B- (1) Folkestone library decision paper taken to Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee in January 2025 and (2) key decision [25/00116](#).

Appendix C – Creative Folkestone's submitted proposal (exempt)

Appendix D – (1) Options appraisal and financial summary (2) Exempt addendum to appendix D

Appendix E –(1) EqIA supporting 24/00116, (2) Sandgate Road temporary library EqIA

17. Contact details

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From: Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory services

Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance,
Corporate and Traded services

Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth Environment and Transport

Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee -
22 January 2025

Subject: The future of library provision in Folkestone town centre

Decision no: 24/00116

Classification: Unrestricted

Future Pathway of Report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All divisions within Folkestone and Hythe district

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This paper covers the results of the recent public consultation on the future town centre location of the Folkestone Library and registration service, analysis of the options available and the proposed next steps KCC proposes to progress to find a long-term solution.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the proposed decision to:

- A. APPROVE to issue the draft consultation report set out in Appendix B.
- B. APPROVE to Issue the consultation response set out in Appendix C.
- C. Note that KCC remain committed to a full town centre library provision in Folkestone Town Centre.
- D. APPROVE that further work be undertaken to explore and implement an alternative town centre location for the temporary library and registration service, from which a greater range of services could be delivered, within current budgets, until a permanent library and registration service location is opened in the town centre.
- E. APPROVE that the options for the future of the Grace Hill building which involve KCC retaining responsibility for maintenance and repair of the building, be discounted, acknowledging that this will very likely require KCC to make a disposal of the building to a third party (by way of freehold transfer or grant of a long lease), and progress actions relating to its listing as an asset of community value (ACV), including issuing a notice to Folkestone & Hythe

District Council of intention to dispose (Folkestone & Hythe District Council being the statutory body that administers the ACV process under the Localism Act 2011) This notice will trigger the ACV process.

- F. APPROVE that further work be undertaken on the two remaining options, including further engagement with Creative Folkestone and, if appropriate, other individuals or groups who may make proposals for the Grace Hill building (including through the ACV process).
 - G. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to issue the draft consultation responses
 - H. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Community and Regulatory Services to proceed with the work required on the remaining two options, noting that these will be subject to further governance and decision making
 - I. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A
 - J. Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Folkestone town centre library and registration service is located in the Grade II listed building at 2 Grace Hill (referred to throughout as the 'Grace Hill building'). This building had to be closed due to health and safety reasons in December 2022. This necessitated the temporary closure of the service and provision of temporary services and facilities nearby. The latest cost estimate to repair the Grace Hill building is £2.9m. Following the temporary closure, KCC has been exploring the options for the future provision of the service and undertook an eight-week public consultation in 2024.
- 1.2 This report covers the outcomes of the public consultation and recommends next steps.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Library, Registration and Archives (LRA) service is a statutory and highly valued public service which is currently delivered through; a network of 99 libraries, five register offices, five mobile libraries, an archive centre, the stock distribution and support function building at Quarry Wood, the information service 'Ask a Kent Librarian'; and 24-hour accessible online services.
- 2.2 Library authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who live, work or study in the area'.

- 2.3 Folkestone Library is part of this network and until December 2022, the town centre library and registration service was provided at the Grace Hill building.
- 2.4 The Grace Hill building temporarily closed in December 2022 because it became unsafe for customers and staff. Since then work has been undertaken to, investigate the extent and cost of the works needed to bring the building back into use, exploring ways to fund the works, explore other locations in Folkestone town centre where the library could be located, and consider the future of the Grace Hill building.
- 2.5 While the Grace Hill building has been temporarily closed, temporary service provision has been put in place for service users and resident to access a library and registration service which consists of:
- Town centre access to the local history collections and public PCs at 'Folkestone Library – Heritage and Digital Access.' This also includes a free library book (and other materials) borrowing and reservation service.
 - Extended branch opening at nearby Wood Avenue and Cheriton libraries.
 - Additional public PCs and an additional location where public can complete birth and death registration appointments at Wood Avenue Library.
 - Promotion of other ways to access free library services online, the Mobile Library and the Home Library Service.
- 2.6 A petition was lodged with KCC and ran from 28/03/2023 to 29/06/2023. This called on KCC to 'fix Folkestone library and re-open it to the public.' The petition was signed by 3,647 people and as a result there was a petition debate at the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee in September 2023
- 2.7 The Grace Hill building was listed by Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC) as an asset of community value (ACV) in July 2023.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 An eight-week public consultation on the future of Folkestone Library ran from 18 July to 11 September 2024.

Consultation process

- 3.2 The consultation document was available online at www.kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary via our Let's talk Kent website, promoted and highlighted to local partners and stakeholders, and paper copies were available in all Folkestone and Hythe district libraries. It was also available in large print and easy read formats. All consultation and promotional materials included contact details to request hard copies and any other formats or languages.
- 3.3 Alongside the consultation document the following supporting documents were also made available:
- Consultation stage Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).
 - Breakdown of the estimated costs to repair the Grace Hill building.

- Frequently Asked Questions, which were updated throughout the consultation period.
- 3.4 During the consultation period there were 5,180 visits to the consultation webpage by 4,673 visitors.
- 3.5 Feedback was captured via an online questionnaire and paper copies were available in Folkestone and Hythe district libraries and on request. A word version of the questionnaire was also made available online for anyone who did not want to complete the online version. Emails and letters received during the consultation period have been analysed and considered alongside the questionnaire responses.
- 3.6 Four in-person drop-in sessions were advertised and took place at Wood Avenue Library and 5 Grace Hill (Folkestone Library – Heritage and Digital Access). These were to raise awareness of the consultation and provide the opportunity for people to ask questions. The sessions were scheduled on different days and times to allow as many people as possible to attend. As well as asking questions face to face, attendees could fill in the questionnaire during drop-in sessions or take away the questionnaire to fill in at home and return via any library.
- 3.7 A wide range of communication methods were used to promote the consultation, including:
- Press releases at the start and towards the end of the consultation and a half page local newspaper advert.
 - Email to key stakeholders including community groups, schools, town and parish councils, local voluntary and charity organisations and library groups and partners.
 - Promotion via the LRA staff and displays in all the Folkestone and Hythe district libraries.
 - An invite to 549 people and organisations registered with Let's talk Kent who had expressed an interest in hearing about new consultations on libraries in the Folkestone and Hythe district.
 - Posters displayed at the Grace Hill building and other public buildings in Folkestone.
 - Social media posts from Folkestone Library, Kent Libraries and KCC's corporate social media accounts. This included paid Facebook adverts to extend the reach of the consultation beyond those who follow KCC's channels.
 - Promotional links from the Folkestone Library service webpage on Kent.gov.
 - Articles in KCC's residents' e-newsletter.
- 3.8 The Save Folkestone Library group and other members of the community also undertook extensive promotional activity. They organised handing out of the promotional posters, took paper copies of the questionnaire to distribute, highlighted the consultation on social media and organised several events during the period. KCC is grateful to the group and all local partners in ensuring that the consultation was promoted as widely as possible.

3.9 The consultation received 600 responses. 510 were submitted online, and 86 questionnaires were submitted in hard copy or by email. An additional four emails and letters were received, and this feedback has been analysed alongside responses provided via the consultation questionnaire.

Consultation proposals

3.10 The consultation explained that, since the temporary closure of the library in December 2022, KCC had been investigating the extent and cost of works needed to bring the Grace Hill building back into use, exploring ways to fund the repairs, looking at other locations in Folkestone town centre where the library could be located, and considering the future of the Grace Hill building. The consultation explained the options KCC had been considering and that, while these were at a formative stage, they had developed to the point where KCC wished to seek the public's views before progressing any further.

3.11 The consultation explained that KCC's preferred option, at that stage, was to:

- Permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the Folkestone town centre library and registration service; and
- Take forward work with Folkestone & Hythe District Council on moving the service to the FOLCA¹ building on the high street.

3.12 The consultation addressed the following alternative options:

- Continue with temporary provision permanently and exit the Grace Hill building.
- Make repairs to the Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library within the Grace Hill building and co-locate with other services.
- Relocate the library service to another existing KCC building.
- Sell or issue a long lease to another party and then lease back part of the building. It was noted that Creative Folkestone had expressed an interest to KCC in taking forward an idea/proposal of this nature (see Section 6 below).
- Move the library service to an alternative leasehold site.

4. Overview of Consultation Feedback

4.1 Lake Market Research have independently analysed consultation responses. Cabinet Members have been briefed on the results, but Cabinet Committee Members are invited to carefully consider the full consultation report as set out at Appendix B.

4.2 In summary:

- 55% of consultees disagreed with KCC's proposal to permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the library and registration service, while 38% of consultees agreed.

¹ This is the name of the building **owned by Folkestone & Hythe District Council**, which was the former Debenhams store on the High Street in Folkestone.

- The most common reasons for disagreement with this proposal related to how the Grace Hill building is seen locally, for example its historic and heritage character, the fact that it is a listed building, as well as the view that the building should be restored and preserved as a library. Consultees noted that Grace Hill was purpose built as a library, and that it was gifted to Folkestone as a public asset. Some consultees also preferred the location of Grace Hill to any other in the town centre.
 - The most common reason for agreement was that the library should be in a central, convenient location, and that moving the library as proposed would be beneficial to the town. Some consultees expressed general agreement with moving the library to another location. Other consultees in agreement referred to understanding the financial considerations.
- When asked about agreement or disagreement with KCC's preferred option to move the library and registration service to FOLCA, 51% disagreed and 43% agreed.
 - The most common reasons for disagreement included specific factors relating to the Grace Hill building and a desire to restore the building as a library. Some consultees also expressed concerns about the suitability of the FOLCA building, the cost of moving to FOLCA, and concerns about KCC renting rather than owning a library building.
 - The most common reasons for agreement again related to a desire for the library to be in a central, convenient location. Some expressed the view that FOLCA would be accessible, including by public transport, had good parking nearby, and would attract more people to use the service.

4.3 Several other specific themes emerged from consultation feedback which have informed the consideration of next steps, as explained elsewhere in this report.

4.4 Cabinet Committee are invited to review Appendix C. This is the consultation response and reflects the options analysis and proposals set out in this report.

5. Engagement with Creative Folkestone

5.1 Prior to, during and following the consultation Creative Folkestone continued, with the support of others, to express an interest in the future of the library service at the Grace Hill building. Creative Folkestone is an independent arts charity established in 2002 to regenerate Folkestone and the surrounding area, with a focus on 'making it a great place for people to live, work, study, play and visit through creativity'.

5.2 Creative Folkestone has indicated that it may be prepared to take over responsibility for the Grace Hill building from KCC by way of a disposal (either a gift or long-term lease at peppercorn rent), with the intention of allowing it, as a charity, to raise funding that may not be available to KCC to address the physical condition of the building. This idea is linked to Creative Folkestone's broader proposals for a Creative Campus. Creative Folkestone envisages that

the library could remain on the ground floor of the Grace Hill building, with other parts of the building put to community use and use as a space for artists. KCC has engaged with Creative Folkestone on this since late 2023.

- 5.3 Following the consultation, officers met with Creative Folkestone to further discuss their ideas with a view to ensuring that KCC has full information about the proposed approach, was aware of any changes, and to explain officers' working views. The meeting was constructive with a shared understanding that further discussion would be needed to further develop. The purpose of further engagement is to enable KCC to take an informed decision regarding this option in due course.

6. KCC Financial Position and Capital Maintenance Budget

- 6.1 Like many other councils, KCC is facing significant financial challenges. Since 2011, KCC has had to make almost £1 billion in savings and income generation to manage services and assets within the funding available to us. However, the demand for and cost of providing services was such that, for the first time in 22 years, KCC ended the 2022-23 financial year with a significant overspend of £44.4 million, followed by an overspend of £9.6m in 2023-24. KCC funded these overspends by using reserves, but this is not a sustainable solution.
- 6.2 The biggest pressures were related to services for the most vulnerable residents in the areas of adult and children's social care, and home to school transport. These services are continuing to present financial pressures in 2024-25 and again KCC is forecast to overspend. We estimate the additional demand and costs for these service areas alone will total £83 million in 2025-26.
- 6.3 The draft budget for 2025-26 identifies core funded spending growth of £150.4m, compared to funding increase of £96.5m (Council Tax, Business Rates and General Grant increases/growth) so once other minor adjustments are reflected, this leaves a shortfall of £62.7m that needs to be closed through savings and income. A balanced budget is being proposed to County Council for 2025-26 but this relies on several one-off initiatives that require base funding in 2026-27 onwards, as well as any additional savings and income that will be necessary in latter years as core funded spending growth continues to exceed available funding increases each year. We are continuing to look across all our services to identify where savings can be made, and income can be raised. Spending controls are in place and difficult decisions across KCC's services, and regarding the disposal of surplus buildings, are having to be considered. All of this highlights the significant financial pressure KCC remains under.
- 6.4 At present the annual capital budget for maintenance of all KCC property assets, is £3m just to maintain the status quo, alongside which KCC faces an estimated £159m backlog of maintenance and condition works across all buildings. An additional £5.6m has been allocated in 2025-26 and 2026-27 to complete some of the most urgent back-log maintenance issues. This however falls significantly short of what is required across the estate and at the present time it is necessary to prioritise spend to support safeguarding and essential services such as care homes and highways depots. No funding was able to be allocated to the Grace Hill library. In 2024/25 an allocation of £500k was made for works across KCC's 99 libraries, nine country parks and seven picnic sites.

- 6.5 The financial climate of local government and KCC are such that unfortunately it has and continues to be necessary to consider difficult decisions across a range of service areas and must also consider disposal of buildings to meet the financial challenge.
- 6.6 Budget papers for the 2025-26 financial year have been taken to all KCC Cabinet Committees. The proposed budget contains specific proposals for savings and income with a view to offsetting the growth pressures facing the Council and for which an increase in Council Tax, Business Rates and General Grants is insufficient to meet the budget gap. The proposed budget for 2025-26 will be presented to County Council in February 2025 and covers both revenue and capital budgets.

7. Critical Success Factors and Key Considerations

- 7.1 The critical success factors and key considerations which options are considered against are as outlined below:

- Service requirements: does the option meet LRA's service's requirements? These are:
 - Location. It is important to be somewhere visible and accessible, which is why high street locations are generally the service's preference. They are where most people will go or be able to get to. Libraries can play an important role in wider high street regeneration. As a rule, we want to be in a location that lots of people will naturally pass so that we can advertise and be visible for those who are not yet users of the service with the desire that they do become users. Where the best location is in a community may change over time and we should always keep this under review.
 - Space. We need adequate and affordable space to meet service needs.
 - Partnership potential. The service is in general keen to co-locate with other customer and community services. This brings more services to people in one convenient place but also has the potential to increase the take-up of library and other services for those who do not currently use them. There is extensive evidence of successful partnership working and co-locations across Kent.
- Financial factors: How much will it cost KCC, both in terms of capital and revenue both short and long term? Does the option rely on securing grant funding? If so, what timescale could we be looking at? Will the option generate any income for KCC, given the already-described financial challenge facing the Council?

- 7.2 Other key considerations are:

- Deliverability. Can the option be delivered and what is the timeline for deliverability?
- Environmental. Does the option reduce the carbon footprint therefore supporting KCC's net zero target?

8. Options Analysis

Overview

8.1 Each of the options identified in the consultation document have been assessed against the critical success factors and key considerations above. Taking this into account and the outcomes and feedback from the public consultation it is proposed that the following options should be discounted:

- Continue with temporary provision permanently and exit the Grace Hill building.
- Make repairs to the Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library and co-locate with other services there.
- Relocate the library service to another existing KCC building.

8.2 It is recommended that further consideration given to the following two options:

- Selling or issuing a long lease of the Grace Hill building to another party, and then leasing back part of the building. This option would enable KCC to relinquish its interest in and responsibility for maintenance and repair of the Grace Hill building, whilst retaining the library and registration service at the Grace Hill building. This option is the subject of ongoing engagement with Creative Folkestone. This option may also involve the consideration of proposals from other individuals or groups, should any such proposals be made (including through the ACV process).
- KCC's original preferred option to exit the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the LRA service.

Options analysis detail

Continue with temporary provision permanently and exit the Grace Hill building

8.3 This option would be the most financially advantageous, as it would not involve additional capital spend on repairing the Grace Hill building and enable KCC to realise the capital value of the asset. It would be deliverable (it is the option currently in place) and would help KCC achieve its net zero target (reflecting the smaller library space currently being made available).

8.4 However, this option would not meet the service's requirement and therefore only meets one of the critical success factors. The current temporary provision does not allow full library and registration services to be delivered from one town centre location, it is scattered across the town, and beyond the branch libraries there is no town centre book browsing or children's library. The current temporary provision was never intended to be a permanent replacement for the services delivered from the Grace Hill building, and this remains the case.

8.5 Consultees also raised concerns about the current temporary provision. A number of consultees, when asked about the alternative options for Folkestone library, expressed the view that the current temporary provision is not suitable

for the long term. Others expressed the view that permanent library facilities were required as soon as possible, with no preference as to location. A clear message from the consultation feedback is that people wanted to see either the re-opening of the library at the Grace Hill building or the service move to a single permanent alternative location.

8.6 It is therefore recommended that this option should be discounted.

Make repairs to the Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library and co-locate with other services

8.7 This option is not considered financially affordable, notwithstanding the strong views and wishes of many consultees concerning repairing and re-opening the Grace Hill building. This is because the cost of undertaking necessary repairs to the building, with a view to re-opening the library making the building sound for the short-term, is estimated to be £2.9m (as at the time of consultation). This is based on an assessment undertaken in May 2024 by a Chartered Building Surveyor. Estimated costs may change over time.

8.8 As explained above, KCC is faced with significant financial challenges. We have had to make difficult decisions in a number of areas regarding service provision, the disposal of other assets in KCC's estate, and regarding the amount we spend on capital maintenance.

8.9 Given the age, construction and listed status of the building, there is a risk that significant additional costs may be required in future or that there may be a closure in the future should there be another significant failure.

8.10 Many consultees disagreed with KCC's proposal to leave the Grace Hill building and felt that KCC should find a way to repair the building. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to permanently leave Grace Hill and find an alternative town centre location for the service, roughly a third of consultees raised points relating to the broader value of the building as, for example, a historic, attractive, community, listed building, and a landmark in Folkestone. A similar proportion expressed the view that the building should be restored and preserved as a library. Around a fifth of consultees expressed views connected with seeing the building as a public space which belongs (and was gifted) to the community. Some consultees expressed a preference for the location of the building at Grace Hill (albeit fewer in number than those who indicated support for a high street location).

8.11 A number of potential ideas for enabling KCC to retain ownership of the building and make repairs were proposed in response to the consultation. For example, it was suggested that KCC could fundraise with the local community, and that KCC could reach out to local businesses to make the cost of repairs cheaper as well as using volunteers to undertake the works. It was also suggested that KCC should apply to other sources of grant funding and that other uses could be made of the space at Grace Hill, some of which (such as venue hire and a café) could raise revenue. Given the £2.9m estimated cost of the repairs, and the complex nature of any restoration project, which would need to be undertaken by expert contractors, we do not consider these

options to be viable. The alternative ideas suggested by consultees are further considered as part of Appendix C.

- 8.12 The service considers that there are both advantages and disadvantages of the space at Grace Hill. The building maintenance issues have impacted on the ability to deliver a reliable and quality service over the years, for example unplanned closures or necessitating buckets around the building to capture water ingress. It does however provide sufficient space from which to deliver the service, and is an existing, known building. There may be some scope for revising and improving the layout to maximise space. On the other hand, the structure, nature and layout of the building has previously prevented KCC from taking forward the co-location of KCC services or maximising the use of the space, adult education for example. Overall, the service has a preference for a high street location, which it considers would help make the service more visible and attract more customers.
- 8.13 Regarding environmental considerations, while some improvements could be made, due to the age and construction of the Grace Hill building this option would not significantly contribute to achieving KCC's net zero target.
- 8.14 The main deliverability challenge for KCC in regard to the Grace Hill building is financial, as explained above. Cabinet members as well as Cabinet Committee should have careful regard to consultees' views, and the other factors above. Taking everything into account and particularly the financial circumstances facing KCC, it is felt that spending £2.9m on a single building is not justifiable or a responsible use of KCC funds.
- 8.15 It is therefore recommended that this option should be discounted.

Relocate the library service to another existing KCC building.

- 8.16 Opportunities have been explored to relocate the service to other KCC services in Folkestone town centre, namely: The Cube (KCC Adult Education); the KCC Family Hub buildings around Tontine Street; and the KCC offices at Cheriton House, Cheriton High Street.
- 8.17 None of these buildings would provide enough space taking into account other service usage of these buildings from which to deliver the library service or offer an improved location in the town. Additionally, Cheriton House is not in Folkestone town centre.
- 8.18 There was no significant support within consultation responses for a move to any existing KCC building in Folkestone.
- 8.19 From a review of the KCC buildings there is no suitable KCC space available which makes this option undeliverable.
- 8.20 We therefore recommend that this option should be discounted.

Sell or issue a long lease to another party and then lease back part of the building

- 8.21 This option would involve selling the building or granting a long lease to another party on the basis that KCC could lease back part of the building for the library to use. Creative Folkestone is the only potential partner so far to have proposed taking forward this type of arrangement.
- 8.22 As explained above, many consultees felt that the Grace Hill building should be repaired and remain as a library, often highlighting the building's specific characteristics. Some consultees also preferred the location of the Grace Hill library to the high street. 17 consultees (3% of those answering the question), when explaining their agreement or disagreement with the proposal to permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative location on the high street, expressed a view that KCC should consider the Creative Folkestone proposal. When asked to provide comments on alternative options, 25 consultees (7% of those answering the question) said that KCC should consider the Creative Folkestone proposal, and a further 14 (4%) gave positive responses regarding a sale and leaseback. 64 consultees (18% of those answering the same question) indicated that KCC should share the Grace Hill building with partner services as a way of keeping the library there. A smaller number of consultees referred to the Creative Folkestone proposal when providing any further comments not already covered in their consultation response.
- 8.23 This option is subject to ongoing engagement with Creative Folkestone and may also involve the consideration of proposals from other individuals or groups, should any such proposals be made (including through the ACV process). Continuing to explore this option is consistent with important elements of consultation feedback. Officers intend to return to Cabinet Members and Cabinet Committee with further information and analysis in due course.

Permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the library

- 8.24 This remains a potential option for returning a full town centre library and registration service to Folkestone. The consultation explained that, following its purchase of the former Debenhams store on the high street, now named FOLCA, Folkestone & Hythe District Council's (FHDC) ambition was to deliver a mixed-use building in the heart of Folkestone. KCC officers have engaged with FHDC's officers around the potential for the library to be part of the project which is looking at concept design for a combination of public sector, community and commercial space. KCC's proposal, subject to consultation feedback, was to take forward the detailed work needed with the District Council to realise this project. If, for any reason it was not possible to progress a move to FOLCA, then the consultation explained that KCC would commit to finding an alternative town centre site.
- 8.25 This option would meet the service's requirements. The FOLCA building could provide a public library space that is equivalent to the public library and registration spaces at Grace Hill. It would offer potential advantages in terms of the ability to develop a new modern library layout design and the potential to work and collaborate with other public services. It would also offer advantages in terms of its location. A high street location for the library service

would bring greater visibility and opportunities to attract customers to the service. If, for any reason, it was not possible to take forward the FOLCA building, officers would look at other leasehold sites available on or close to the High Street. Officers have initially identified some potential alternative leasehold sites.

8.26 This option would be financially viable. It would avoid the need to spend an estimated £2.9m on repairing the Grace Hill building which, as explained above, is not considered to be affordable given KCC's financial position. If the library service were to leave the Grace Hill building, the building would be declared surplus to requirements, enabling KCC to potentially realise a capital receipt, after following the ACV process. This option would also avoid the risk of exposure to significant future maintenance liabilities if KCC remained responsible for the Grace Hill building. KCC currently estimates that the capital investment needed to move into the FOLCA building and transform the empty space into a functioning library would be around £150,000 to £200,000. The service and building operating costs (including staffing and service charge) would be expected to be similar to how much it cost us at Grace Hill.

8.27 Officers assess that this option is deliverable, although there are areas of uncertainty. The FOLCA option is subject to more detailed development, working with the District Council. Prior to consultation, officers at KCC and FHDC drew up indicative costs and principles of a potential lease arrangement. Further details would need to be developed and formal agreement would be needed. FHDC submitted a consultation response making clear that its first preference was for KCC to make repairs to, and re-open the Grace Hill building, co-locating with other service, with a second preference of selling and leasing back part of the building for the library service. FHDC explained that:

If KCC decides against these options, then our preference is the library service be retained in Folkestone town centre. However, this option should not be considered without full public disclosure of both the outcome of this consultation together with the basis for the final decision made.

It is only at that point that this Council would be able to consider progressing a decision about using Folca for the library and registration services.

8.28 Some consultees raised concerns about the cost and time involved in converting FOLCA or another town centre site, including specific concerns about the condition and suitability of the FOLCA building and possible maintenance issues. Any building issues would need to be addressed as part of the project. Ultimately, responsibility for the building would rest with FHDC as owners of the building. It is also acknowledged that time would be needed to complete all necessary works and that overall timescales for delivery are still to be confirmed and subject to FHDC's governance and processes.

8.29 Relocating to the FOLCA building would be likely to reduce KCC's carbon footprint relative to remaining at the Grace Hill building. The same would likely be true of an alternative town centre site.

- 8.30 There was support for KCC's proposed option among a significant proportion of consultees. While more consultees disagreed than agreed, 38% of consultees indicated that they agreed with KCC's proposal to permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the library service (21% agreeing, and 17% tending to agree). The most common reason for agreement related to the view that the library should be located in a convenient town centre location. A significant minority of consultees also agreed with KCC's proposals given the financial reasons described in the consultation. Some consultees expressed enthusiasm for the FOLCA project on the basis that FOLCA is itself an important building for the town centre. 43% of consultees indicated they agree with KCC's preferred option to move the service to FOLCA. Again the most common reason for agreement related to the location of FOLCA (including access, parking and transport).
- 8.31 50% of consultees disagreed with the proposal to leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the library and registration service, and 51% disagreed with KCC's preferred option to move the library and registration service to FOLCA. The most common reasons for disagreement with the proposal to leave Grace Hill are discussed above (see paragraph 8.10). Consultees also raised specific concerns about the suitability of the FOLCA building (see paragraph 8.28 above).
- 8.32 Considering KCC's critical success factors, other relevant considerations, and consultation feedback, it is considered that KCC's proposal for the service to permanently leave the Grace Hill site and find an alternative town centre location remains viable, and should not be discounted.

ACV Status of the Grace Hill building and Recommendation to Issue Notice of Intention to Dispose

- 8.33 As explained above, it is recommended that further consideration should be given to the two options referred to at paragraph 8.2.
- 8.34 It should be noted that both of these involve inherent uncertainties and would require detailed work with partners over an extended period of time, including on legal agreements, funding, and redevelopment works.
- 8.35 Both recommended remaining options would very likely involve a disposal of the Grace Hill building to a third party (by way of freehold transfer or grant of a long lease) in line with KCC's **disposal policy** ([link to policy](#)). This would free KCC of responsibility for maintenance and repair of the Grace Hill building which would pass to the third party.
- 8.36 The Grace Hill building is listed as an asset of community value (ACV) under relevant provisions of the Localism Act 2011. KCC therefore cannot enter into a "relevant disposal" of the building unless a number of statutory conditions are met. A relevant disposal is a disposal of the freehold estate of the land with vacant possession or the grant of a lease of a term of at least 25 years. Both recommended remaining options would very likely involve KCC entering into a relevant disposal.

- 8.37 Given the above, it is recommended that KCC now issues a notice of intention to dispose to Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC). This would trigger the ACV process. Separately, bids would be invited on an all-enquiries basis including freehold disposal or via a long-leasehold structure and would be compliant with KCC's disposal policy. KCC would invite bidders to set out the detail of proposals that could allow the LRA service to remain in part of the building. This would enable consideration of all proposals regarding the building. It would also allow both the recommended remaining options to continue, and officers to return to Cabinet Members and Cabinet Committee with further information and analysis, and recommendations for decision-making.
- 8.38 Issuing a notice of intention to dispose will trigger an initial six week moratorium period, during which any community interest group may submit to FHDC a written request to be treated as a potential bidder for the land. If no such request is received from a community interest group within the six week moratorium, then from an ACV perspective KCC will be free to dispose of the Grace Hill building in line with its disposal policy. However, if a written request is received within the initial moratorium, it will trigger the six-month 'full moratorium period' during which KCC may not enter into a relevant disposal other than to a community interest group. KCC is not obliged to accept any bid from a community interest group. At the end of the full moratorium, from an ACV perspective KCC will be free to dispose of the Grace Hill building as it wishes in line with its disposal policy.

9. Commercial Bids

- 9.1 Under section 123 of the Local Government Act KCC has a statutory duty to obtain best consideration in the disposal of land, unless the purpose for which the land is to be disposed is likely to contribute to the promotion or improvement of economic, social, or environmental well-being. KCC's approach in relation to freehold asset disposals is set out in the Council's disposal policy, including how value in relation to KCC statutory services can be considered alongside commercial bids as part of an open marketing process. KCC will need to consider any potential disposal in light of its disposal policy in due course.

10. Temporary Provision

- 10.1 As explained above, temporary town centre library and registration service provision has been put in place following the closure of the library in December 2022. Some consultees raised concerns about the sufficiency of this as well as the time it was taking in bringing back a full town centre library and registration offer. Cabinet Committee is asked to note that either of the two recommended remaining options will take a significant period, possibly years, to deliver.
- 10.2 It is therefore proposed to explore further and implement an alternative town centre location where temporary library and registration services could better be delivered with a greater range of services, within current budgets, until a permanent library and registration service location is opened in the town centre. This could include a single site temporary library and registration

service which could include a children's library, public PCs, birth and death registration, the heritage collections and lending book collections for example..

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1 Cabinet Committee is asked to note KCC's ongoing statutory duty relating to the provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service across the County. Officers consider that the current temporary provision in Folkestone meets this duty although, as above, we recommend that further enhancements of the temporary provision are explored.
- 11.2 The Committee is also asked to note the legal requirement that KCC gives conscientious consideration to consultation responses. Committee Members should give careful thought to the analysis of consultation responses in this report, the analysis set out in the draft consultation response at Appendix C, and the consultation report at Appendix B.
- 11.3 KCC must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in s. 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Cabinet Members are referred to the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) at Appendix D.
- 11.4 The statutory requirements relating to the status of the Grace Hill building as an asset of community value are covered above.

12. Equalities implications

- 12.1 An EqIA has been undertaken for this project which has been updated following the public consultation. The key findings from this support the recommendations of this paper:
 - KCC is committed to providing a full town centre library service for everyone. This is restated to mitigate any concerns raised that certain customer groups e.g. children would be disadvantaged.
 - There was feedback that any move of the library away from Grace Hill may increase is distance from the immediate area and make the service less accessible for those with protected characteristics in that area. Whilst the immediate location in Grace Hill does have high levels of deprivation, it is considered that a high street location does have the advantages of greater accessibility across the district for those that have protected characteristics.
 - Equally there was also feedback that a town centre location would be an improvement with parking and public transport links close by.
 - Any design of future library and registration space for Folkestone would consider feedback to ensure that wherever it is located we deliver an inclusive and accessible space for all.
 - The EQIA will continue to be developed as part of next steps.

- 12.2 The full EQIA is included as Appendix D

13. Financial Implications

- 13.1 The £2.9m estimated costs are simply to repair the building. As explained in the options analysis, spending £2.9m on repairing just one building is not justifiable. KCC also needs to be mindful of the risk that significant additional costs may be required in future, given the age, construction, and listed status of the building. It is recommended that other options (i.e. continuing with the current temporary provision and relocating the service to another existing KCC building) are discounted for non-financial reasons. The financial implications of the recommended remaining options will be further addressed in a future decision report.
- 13.2 The Best Value Duty is a statutory requirement for local authorities under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 and 1999. The financial context of the Council remains challenging, and any decision will be taken considering both the capital and revenue financial position in determining the best value solution.

14. Governance

- 14.1 Future Key Decision paper to come to Cabinet Committee on the location of the permanent provision once further work on the recommended remaining options has been undertaken.

15. Conclusions

- 15.1 While recognising consultees' views about the Grace Hill building, it is not considered that making the necessary repairs to the building is financially justifiable.
- 15.2 It is recommended to undertake further work on the two remaining options set out at paragraph 8.2 above.
- 15.3 Both these options would very likely involve a disposal of the building to a third party, which would free KCC of responsibility for maintenance and repair of the Grace Hill building. It is recommended that KCC now issues a Notice of Intention to Dispose in respect of the Grace Hill building to FHDC. This would allow further work to continue on both remaining options. It would also allow KCC to consider any further proposals or options that come forward.
- 15.4 Officers intend to continue to explore other alternative town centre locations including continued exploration of the FOLCA option with FHDC.
- 15.5 It is also recognised as set out in the feedback the desire to see town centre library provision return to a single location as soon as possible. It is proposed to look at the options for improved temporary provision while we take forward work on a permanent solution.
- 15.6 Officers propose to return to Cabinet Members and Cabinet Committee in due course with further information and analysis to enable an informed decision to be made about the future of Folkestone Library and the registration service.

16. Recommendation(s):

16.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services on the proposed decision to:

- A. APPROVE to issue the draft consultation report set out in Appendix B.
- B. APPROVE to Issue the consultation response set out in Appendix C.
- C. Note that KCC remain committed to a full town centre library provision in Folkestone Town Centre.
- D. APPROVE that further work be undertaken to explore and implement an alternative town centre location for the temporary library and registration service, from which a greater range of services could be delivered, within current budgets, until a permanent library and registration service location is opened in the town centre.
- E. APPROVE that the options for the future of the Grace Hill building which involve KCC retaining responsibility for maintenance and repair of the building, be discounted, acknowledging that this will very likely require KCC to make a disposal of the building to a third party (by way of freehold transfer or grant of a long lease), and progress actions relating to its listing as an asset of community value (ACV), including issuing a notice to Folkestone & Hythe District Council of intention to dispose (Folkestone & Hythe District Council being the statutory body that administers the ACV process under the Localism Act 2011) This notice will trigger the ACV process.
- F. APPROVE that further work be undertaken on the two remaining options, including further engagement with Creative Folkestone and, if appropriate, other individuals or groups who may make proposals for the Grace Hill building (including through the ACV process).
- G. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to issue the draft consultation responses
- H. DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Community and Regulatory Services to proceed with the work required on the remaining two options, noting that these will be subject to further governance and decision making
- I. Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A
- J. Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision as shown at Appendix A

18. Appendices

- Appendix A- Proposed Record of Decision
- Appendix B- Folkestone Library consultation report
- Appendix C- Draft KCC consultation response themes consideration and alternative proposal and alternative ideas consideration.

19. Contact details

<p>Report Authors: James Pearson Job title: Head of Libraries, Registration & Libraries Telephone number: 03000 414923 Email address: james.pearson@kent.gov.uk</p> <p>Rebecca Anderson Job title: Head of Business and Information Strategy and Assurance Telephone number: 03000 417731 Email address: Rebecca.anderson2@kent.gov.uk</p>	<p>Relevant Directors: Stephanie Holt-Castle Job title: Director for Growth and Communities Telephone number: 03000 412064 Email address: stephanie.holt-castle@kent.gov.uk</p> <p>Rebecca Spore Job title: Director of Infrastructure Telephone number: 03000 416716 Email address: Rebecca.spore@kent.gov.uk</p>
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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory services

DECISION NO:

24/00116

For publication

Key decision: YES

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

The future of library provision in Folkestone town centre

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services I agree to:

- A) APPROVE to issue the draft consultation report set out in Appendix B.
- B) APPROVE to Issue the consultation response set out in Appendix C.
- C) Note that KCC remain committed to a full town centre library provision in Folkestone Town Centre.
- D) APPROVE that further work be undertaken to explore and implement an alternative town centre location for the temporary library and registration service, from which a greater range of services could be delivered, within current budgets, until a permanent library and registration service location is opened in the town centre.
- E) APPROVE that the options for the future of the Grace Hill building which involve KCC retaining responsibility for maintenance and repair of the building, be discounted, acknowledging that this will very likely require KCC to make a disposal of the building to a third party (by way of freehold transfer or grant of a long lease), and progress actions relating to its listing as an asset of community value (ACV), including issuing a notice to Folkestone & Hythe District Council of intention to dispose (Folkestone & Hythe District Council being the statutory body that administers the ACV process under the Localism Act 2011) This notice will trigger the ACV process.
- F) APPROVE that further work be undertaken on the two remaining options, including further engagement with Creative Folkestone and, if appropriate, other individuals or groups who may make proposals for the Grace Hill building (including through the ACV process).
- G) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport to issue the draft consultation responses
- H) DELEGATE authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Community and Regulatory Services to proceed with the work required on the remaining two options, noting that these will be subject to further governance and decision making
- I) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.
- J) Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services take other relevant actions, including but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

Folkestone town centre library and registration service is located in the Grade II listed building at 2 Grace Hill (referred to throughout as the 'Grace Hill building'). This building had to be closed due to health and safety reasons in December 2022. This necessitated the temporary closure of the service and provision of temporary services and facilities nearby. The latest cost estimate to repair the Grace Hill building is £2.9m. Following the temporary closure, KCC has been exploring the options for the future provision of the service and undertook an eight-week public consultation in 2024.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee considered and endorsed the proposal at their meeting on 22 January 2025.

Following due consideration and discussion at the Cabinet Committee, the Cabinet Member has reviewed and updated the decision wording for bullet E. The original wording was ambiguous as it implied that Kent County Council was giving the building to Folkestone Hythe District Council, rather than issuing a notice to FHDC to trigger the ACV process.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

- Continue with temporary provision permanently and exit the Grace Hill building. This option would not meet the service's requirement for location. The current temporary provision does not allow full library and registration services to be delivered from one town centre location, it is scattered across the town, and beyond the branch libraries there is no town centre book browsing or children's library. The current temporary provision was never intended to be a permanent replacement for the services delivered from the Grace Hill building, and this remains the case
- Make repairs to the Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library and co-locate with other services there. This option is not considered financially affordable
- Relocate the library service to another existing KCC building. Opportunities have been explored to relocate the service to other KCC buildings in Folkestone town centre, however, none of these buildings would provide enough space taking into account other service usage of these buildings from which to deliver the library service, or offer an improved location in the town.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None

Clair Bell

29/01/2025

.....
signed

.....
date

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Subject: Appendix D1 - The future of library provision in Folkestone Town Centre and the next steps for the 2 Grace Hill building

Decision no: 25/00104

Key Decision: Yes, affects more than 2 Electoral Division and Involves Significant Service Development

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Cabinet Members for Community and Regulatory services Key Decision 22 January 2025 - 24/00116

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All divisions within Folkestone and Hythe district

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

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1. Summary

This paper should be read in conjunction with the main committee report.

2. Options Appraisal

The table on the subsequent pages sets out KCC Officer analysis of the options outlined in the main paper. As noted in the main paper, it is proposed that option 1A is selected and all others discounted. Additional commercially sensitive considerations are outlined in appendix D2.

OPTION 1A

Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in-line with adopted policy. Confirm that, for the foreseeable future, 14 Sandgate Road will provide the library and registration facility in Folkestone town centre.

<p>Service Requirements: Location/Space/Partnership Potential</p>	<p>Location: This option would locate the library on the high street where it would expect to benefit from good passing footfall.</p> <p>Space: The space requirements for the full offer library and registration service can be accommodated as covered in all the options. This includes all elements of the lending library, the local history collection and a children's library. Spatial allocation and layouts have been agreed with services.</p> <p>Partnership potential: This option allows for the colocation of the Adult Education Service (CLS) as well as space available for another service (potentially ASCH) and hot desking capacity. This would bring more KCC services together making it easier for people to access multiple services in one location and increase the number of desks available to staff, providing both customer service access and KCC efficiency savings by maximising use of estate.</p>
<p>Financial:</p> <p>Page 122</p>	<p>Capital: Works have been tendered and planning consent obtained as part of the delivery of the temporary library, approved under 24/00166 – these works will be undertaken irrespective of the option selected.</p> <p>Minor additional fitout spend may be required in Q3 2028/29 if continued occupation of 14 Sandgate Road is planned. This investment likely to be lower in cost than the FOLCA capital investment option as majority of works have already been undertaken as part of the temporary provision.</p> <p>Revenue: Lease terms agreed with landlord. KCC is sole occupant of building and revenue costs of operation can be met within existing corporate landlord revenue budgets for respective services. Building is of modern construction, and KCC's financial exposure to service charge is therefore more limited when compared to other options, such as 2A, which involve occupation of buildings with more heritage fabric with a correspondingly higher maintenance burden.</p>
<p>Deliverability:</p>	<p>As this location was chosen as the temporary library location, works are already programmed with a timetable to completion in Spring 2026 with library occupation commencing immediately, other services would begin to occupy during Q2 of 2026.</p> <p>Highly deliverable given building will open for temporary service delivery from Spring 2026 and secure future under negotiated leasehold. KCC has secured lease with 15yr term and 5yr tenant only breaks providing KCC with ongoing flexibility. If this site does become the permanent library in the future then there will be some cost to look at furniture and layout on the basis this has been developed on the basis of being a temporary location to a last a few years at present.</p>

Environmental:	<p>This would be a smaller footprint than the Grace Hill building, which would reduce KCC's carbon footprint in line with Asset Management Strategy objectives. Also, the building would be more environmentally efficient.</p> <p>EPC A – 25 rating.</p>
Ownership Structure and Commercial Arrangements Compatibility with key decision 24/00116:	<p>Long lease terms agreed in line with existing budgets.</p> <p>Adheres to principles of key decision 24/00116.</p>
Consultation feedback Page 123	<p>While not an explicit option included within the 2024 consultation the process invited views on leaving the Grace Hill building for an alternative town centre location and therefore the Council can consider public feedback in respect of the current option 1A. At the time of the public consultation 600 people responded. We asked responders to give their views on KCC’s proposal to permanently leave the Folkestone Library building at 2 Grace Hill and find an alternative town centre location for the Library and Registration service. 38% indicated they agreed with KCC’s proposal and over half- 55% indicated they disagreed.</p> <p>The main themes covered in responses to this question included;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grace Hill is Historic/Part of Folkestone Heritage/listed- 34% - Grace Hill should be repaired /restored- 30% - Library should be in a good location/central/convenient/town centre- 21% - Grace Hill is suitable and purpose built to be a library- 15% - Grace Hill has been left to deteriorate by KCC- 13% - Prefer the current Grace Hill location/accessible- 11% - Highlighting repair/maintenance costs are high at Grace Hill- 10% - Cost effective to move to town centre/recognising KCC doesn’t have money for repairs- 10% <p>Further detail is included in the full consultation feedback report.</p>

OPTION 1B

Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library until and if it has become possible to finalise terms and agree to occupy FOLCA with FHDC.

**Service Requirements:
Location/Space/Partnership
Potential**

Location: This option would locate the library on the high street where it would be expected to benefit from good passing footfall.

Space: The future space requirements for the full offer library and registration service can be accommodated. While subject to further detailed work this space would enable the development of a new library layout to reflect the ever-evolving nature of the modern library service. The space proposed for the library and registration service in FOLCA would be the same as requested for all other options covered in this document.

Partnership potential: Co-locating with other public sector and community services would bring more services together making it easier for people to access services in one place and should enable more use and take-up of all services. Co-location benefits have softened as prospect of other non-commercial occupiers is in question. Depending on space available within the building KCC may have the opportunity to consider relocating non-library services to the building, however this would need to be supported by an independent business case.

Financial:

Capital: The capital investment needed to move the library and registration service to FOLCA and transform the empty space into a functioning library is estimated to cost around £200,000, however this figure would need to be reviewed once the actual space within the building, and its condition, had been confirmed.

Revenue:

Moving to FOLCA would reduce future maintenance liabilities and would support reducing KCC revenue costs. The costs to maintain the library in FOLCA would be lower than at Grace Hill as it will be a newly refurbished space, with a more efficient footprint. The building is not listed so does not have the limitations that there are at Grace Hill and KCC would only be responsible for the area it uses and not all of the expensive building maintenance (such as the roof, boiler etc), recharged to KCC via service charge.

Ongoing costs anticipated to be higher than 14 Sandgate Road as service charge liability will be linked to refurbishment specification which is currently unconfirmed. Direct comparison between open 1B and 2A is problematic given the unfinalised nature of capital works to either building which may help to mitigate ongoing running costs.

<p>Deliverability:</p>	<p>At the current time FHDC’s position is that active engagement on FOLCA will not be possible until the future of 2 Grace Hill has been determined. Subject to future of Grace Hill, should the library wish to occupy FOLCA in the future there may be potential for a further conversation and space available.</p> <p>As with any significant redevelopment project it may take years to come to fruition and the temporary provision will need to remain in place until that point. FHDC have indicated that subject to decisions in 2026 it is envisaged the space may be occupiable by Q4 2028.</p> <p>High dependency on FDHC for both further details on space, cost and timeline.</p>
<p>Environmental:</p>	<p>This would be a smaller footprint than the Grace Hill building, which would reduce KCC's carbon footprint, contributing to our 2030 carbon neutral target.</p> <p>The building would be more environmentally efficient.</p> <p>FHDC has secured support from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund for the development of FOLCA, and this should enable the building to achieve an EPC A rating.</p>
<p>Ownership Structure and Commercial Arrangements</p> <p>Compatibility with key decision 24/00116:</p>	<p>High level HOTS discussed but not formally agreed. Likely long leasehold occupation.</p>
<p>Consultation feedback</p>	<p>At the time of the public consultation 600 people responded. We asked responders to give their views on KCC’s current preferred option to move the library and Registration service to/rent space at FOLCA on the high street. 43% indicated they agree with the proposal and 50% indicated they disagree.</p> <p>The main themes covered in responses to this question included;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It would be a central location/good location/convenient- 27% -Grace Hill should be repaired/restored/renovated and remain a library- 18% -It would be accessible/easy to get to/good parking/public transport- 15% -Makes sense to use FOLCA building- 14% -FOLCA is unsuitable/too much work to Convert FOLCA/requires maintenance- 14% -FOLCA should be used for something else (Not a library)- 11% -FOLCA is acceptable/good choice- 10% <p>Further detail is included in the full consultation feedback report.</p>

OPTION 1C

Exit the Grace Hill building and progress market disposal in line with adopted policy. Confirm 14 Sandgate Road will continue as the temporary library while the Council works to establish an alternative town centre library site which is not FOLCA or 14 Sandgate Road.

Service Requirements: Location/Space/Partnership Potential	This would enable a town centre provision for the service.
Financial:	<p>A move to an unknown town centre location would need to be evaluated based on locations available, currently no other locations sourced..</p> <p>KCC would need to take on a lease or acquire the freehold of an alternative site.</p> <p>The service and building operational costs are unknown at this time but it would be reasonable to assume these would be in the region of those outlined in options 1A and 1B.</p>
Deliverability: Page 126	<p>This option would be subject to the right property being available in the right place and at the right time. If the right property was found it may need adaptations to be suitable for library and registration services. It could take time for the right property to become available.</p> <p>As such the timescales associated with this open cannot be defined and it is not considered deliverable when contrasted with the early 2026 opening associated with 1A and 18+ month target for fundraising and capital works as part of 2A</p>
Environmental:	<p>Unknown currently.</p> <p>Any building the library service moves to is likely to be more environmentally friendly than 2 Grace Hill but it would depend on the specific building identified.</p>
Ownership Structure and Commercial Arrangements Compatibility with key decision 24/00116:	<p>Unknown at this time.</p> <p>An appropriate location has not been identified at this time but is likely to be a leasehold property.</p> <p>No draft lease terms, rent levels, or maintenance obligations can be provided at this time</p>

Consultation feedback

At the time of the public consultation 600 people responded. We asked responders to give their views on KCC's proposal to permanently leave the Folkestone Library building at 2 Grace Hill and find an alternative town centre location for the Library and Registration service. 38% indicated they agreed with KCC's proposal and over half- 55% indicated they disagreed.

The main themes covered in responses to this question included;

- Grace Hill is Historic/Part of Folkestone Heritage/listed- 34%
- Grace Hill should be repaired /restored- 30%
- Library should be in a good location/central/convenient/town centre- 21%
- Grace Hill is suitable and purpose built to be a library- 15%
- Grace Hill has been left to deteriorate by KCC- 13%
- Prefer the current Grace Hill location/accessible- 11%
- Highlighting repair/maintenance costs are high at Grace Hill- 10%
- Cost effective to move to town centre/recognising KCC doesn't have money for repairs- 10%

Further detail is included in the full consultation feedback report.

OPTION 2A

Confirm that the Council will accept Creative Folkestone’s proposal to work towards an alternative grant-funded vision for the Grace Hill building which may include the provision of space for the library service, and until this point in time the temporary library will operate at 14 Sandgate Road.

**Service Requirements:
Location/Space/Partnership
Potential**

Location: 2 Grace Hill is the existing location of library service and is known to users. It is located outside of the main High Street, and closer to areas of deprivation within Folkestone

Space:
Ground floor allocated for library; appendices show indicative layout – however engagement with service to refine would still need to take place. No detailed fit-out plan, costings, or compliance with KCC service specification covered in proposal. Broadly the spatial allocation within the building is considered suitable by the service and is in-line with spatial offering under 1A and 1B.

Partnership potential:
Co-location with creative organisations is a potential positive, as is the proximity to Creative Folkestone’s Creative Campus. However, the exact nature of other partners in other spaces is not detailed.

Financial:
Page 128

Capital: Proposal states that £6.5m is required for Grace Hill building as part of a wider c£10m grant seeking exercise to support required to implement Creative Folkestone’s Creative Campus concept; mentions potential sources (govt, heritage, private donors) but does not provide application criteria, confirmed funding streams, or likelihood of success. No timeline for securing funds beyond a broad “18 months target”. The proposal is dependent on assumption that required capital can be secured from grant funding opportunities.

Requested detail on funding certainty and timescales is missing. While Creative Folkestone have a very successful track record for securing external funding and initial positive conversations with some funders have taken place, the scale of the capital requirement is significant.

Revenue: Draft model included (income ~£182k vs costs ~£185k at 90% occupancy). No sensitivity analysis, contingency plan, or evidence of secured tenants. Requested detailed business plan not provided. Referenced model is for the operation of the building. KCC’s continued occupation of the property and ongoing financial commitment via lease service charge creates significant revenue risk given listed nature of building even if capital works carried out. The ongoing running costs of the building are linked closely to the level of capital investment as part of any refurbishment exercise, however the heritage fabric and design will increase maintenance burden when compared to a more modern alternative.

During the 18th Month period to gain the capital funding KCC would still be the building owner and responsible for ongoing maintenance costs and liabilities. These have been estimated at c£100k pa at present and there may be call for additional spend to maintain the current stable building condition.

Deliverability:	<p>Experienced lead partner but proposal is high-level and contingent on multiple external factors (funding, lease, planning). No risk register or mitigation plan provided. Significant capital works to a listed heritage building present an inherent risk of unexpected discoveries mid -project which can impact both deliverability and timescales.</p>
Environmental:	<p>Positive narrative on reuse and heating upgrades; no quantified targets or compliance plan provided.</p> <p>The Grace Hill building currently has an EPC C – 73 rating.</p> <p>The ability to improve this EPC rating will be limited due to the listed nature of the building.</p>
Ownership Structure and Commercial Arrangements Compatibility with key decision 24/00116:	<p>States KCC will divest maintenance via sale or full repairing lease; no draft lease terms, rent levels, or maintenance obligations provided. Requested commercial detail missing despite efforts to engage.</p>
Consultation feedback Page 129	<p>At the time of the public consultation 600 people responded. We asked responders to give their views on KCC’s proposal to permanently leave the Folkestone Library building at 2 Grace Hill and find an alternative town centre location for the Library and Registration service. 38% indicated they agreed with KCC’s proposal and over half- 55% indicated they disagreed.</p> <p>The main themes covered in responses to this question included;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grace Hill is Historic/Part of Folkestone Heritage/listed- 34% - Grace Hill should be repaired /restored- 30% - Library should be in a good location/central/convenient/town centre- 21% - Grace Hill is suitable and purpose built to be a library- 15% - Grace Hill has been left to deteriorate by KCC- 13% - Prefer the current Grace Hill location/accessible- 11% - Highlighting repair/maintenance costs are high at Grace Hill- 10% - Cost effective to move to town centre/recognising KCC doesn’t have money for repairs- 10% <p>There was also some responses that said KCC should consider the Creative Folkestone proposal (3%). Further detail is included in the full consultation feedback report.</p>

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Submission Section A

EQIA Title

Folkestone Library

Responsible Officer

Anna Hendy - GT GC

Type of Activity

Service Change

Service Change

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

Project/Programme

Commissioning/Procurement

No

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Growth, Environment and Transport

Responsible Service

Libraries, Registration & Archives

Responsible Head of Service

James Pearson

Responsible Director

Stephanie Holt-Castle

Aims and Objectives

Folkestone Library at 2 Grace Hill temporarily closed on 20 December 2022 because it became unsafe for customers and staff. Kent County Council's (KCC) financial situation remains very challenging and means that the Council does not have the budget to repair and reopen the building. The current estimated costs to repair the building is £2.9 million.

Services have been put in place since the temporary closure of the Grace Hill building to minimise the impact of the closure on our customers. These will be kept in place until a long-term town centre location for Folkestone Library opens. The temporary services we have put in place include:

- "Folkestone Library - Heritage and Digital Access" which opened in November 2023 at 5 Grace Hill (previously the Shepway Youth Centre). This is temporarily the location for the complete local studies collection, public PCs, Wi-fi, microfilm reader, photocopying and study space.
- A free reservation service provided at 5 Grace Hill. The service means that customers can order anything from the Kent library catalogue and have it delivered for free to the building for collection.
- The opening hours at the libraries closest to Folkestone town centre have been increased so that there is library provision available six days a week. Hythe Library has increased by 7.5 hours from 37 hours to 44.5 hours per week and Wood Avenue Library has increased by 15.5 hours from 23 hours to 38.5 hours per week. While Folkestone Library was also open on Sundays the temporary provision offers library opening across six days. Sunday usage

was lower compared to the weekdays so to maximise the offer we put the extra hours into the other libraries across Folkestone and Hythe during the week.

- Additional services have been provided at Wood Avenue Library including three additional public computers and increased loanable stock. We have also added this as a location to register a birth or death, in addition to Hythe library.

The temporary provision at 5 Grace Hill was subject to a separate EQIA.

As well as the temporary measures, the following existing library services are also available to help mitigate the impact of the temporary closure:

- E-library service - we have a large digital offer with thousands of free e-books, audiobooks and online newspapers and magazines for all ages and interests.
- Library services direct - including the Home Library Service, where we can deliver library items to people if they cannot visit a library, and also our Mobile Library Service.
- Other libraries in the Folkestone and Hythe district - Hythe, Cheriton, Wood Avenue, Lyminge, Sandgate, Lydd, and New Romney.

KCC is committed to securing a permanent town centre location for the library and registration service. Having carefully considered the options at the point of consultation, KCC proposed to:

- **Permanently leave the Grace Hill building and find an alternative town centre location for the Folkestone library and registration service.**
- **Take forward work with Folkestone & Hythe District Council on moving the library and registration service to FOLCA on the high street.** Ahead of the consultation and subject to any feedback, we considered this to represent the best long-term option for Folkestone's town centre library.

FOLCA is Folkestone & Hythe District Council's project to transform the former Debenhams store (which the District Council owns) on Sandgate Road into a mixed-use building in the heart of Folkestone. The District Council has appointed an architect to develop a concept design for a mixed-use building with a combination of public sector, community and commercial space, including potentially space for KCC to deliver the Folkestone town centre library and registration service. If agreement with the District Council about the FOLCA was not possible then KCC would look for an alternative town centre, high street location to move the library service into.

Discussions with the District Council have progressed positively to the point where we believe this option to move Folkestone Library into FOLCA is feasible and viable.

Before reaching our consultation proposals, a number of other options were considered, and these were detailed in the consultation documentation:

- 1. Continue with temporary provision permanently and exit the 2 Grace Hill building.** The temporary provision does not allow full library and registration services to be delivered from one town centre location. The temporary provision was never envisaged or considered as a permanent replacement. The temporary provision at 5 Grace Hill was subject to a separate EQIA.
- 2. Make repairs to the 2 Grace Hill building, re-open Folkestone Library and co-locate with other services.**
- 3. Relocate full library service to another existing KCC building.** There is no viable alternative KCC building identified so this will not receive any further EQIA analysis.
- 4. Sell/lease the 2 Grace Hill building and then lease back part of the building for Folkestone Library.** Creative Folkestone has indicated that it may be prepared to take over responsibility for the Grace Hill building by way of a disposal (either a gift or long-term lease

at peppercorn rent), with the intention of allowing it, as a charity, to raise funding that may not be available to KCC to address the physical condition of the building. This is the subject of ongoing engagement with Creative Folkestone. This option may also involve consideration of proposals from other individuals or groups, should any such proposals be made (including through the ACV process). There is not enough information available at present to undertake a full screening.

- 5. Move service to an alternative leasehold site.** There is not enough information available at present to undertake a full screening. KCC's Property team continue to investigate potential sites which may be viable alternatives to the FOLCA building. Impacts identified with alternative sites will be assessed as part of future decision-making, as appropriate.

KCC is committed to ensuring that all statutory services previously provided at 2 Grace Hill will be provided in any new location within Folkestone town centre.

The Sassoon Gallery would not be included in the service provision in the options detailed above. other than possibly Option 4, this could impact negatively across all protected characteristic groups. The Gallery is not a statutory function for the library service or KCC to deliver. While KCC recognises the support for a gallery, KCC has to balance that against cost of space as well. In that context we are not looking to re-provide the Sassoon Gallery space as a must-have space requirement. We will continue to explore the potential to work in partnership with others to see if there are other options to providing community gallery space in Folkestone. A gallery remaining at the 2 Grace Hill building may come forward as part of any proposal made by other individuals or groups to return to the 2 Grace Hill building.

This EQIA analyses how all viable options might affect or impact the protected characteristic groups and, where adverse impacts are identified, addresses how such impacts may be mitigated. This EQIA is intended to help ensure the Council complies with its duty to have due regard to the need to: (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and (c) foster good relations between persons with who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

An eight-week public consultation has been completed and the EQIA has been updated to reflect the feedback from this including additional ward data which has been followed up through KCC data and analytics team and subsequently further data from the 2021 census has been included within. This EQIA will be part of the paperwork that will be presented to decision makers to inform the decision.

This EQIA will continue to be developed as KCC undertakes further work on the options proposed to progress as detailed in the Cabinet Committee Report for 22 January 2025.

Equality RISK: Low:

It is recommended that KCC takes a key decision in January 2025 to discount some of the options covered at the time of the public consultation.

Option 1, which is the continuation of the temporary provision, has been analysed and it is clear that it presents a number of negative equalities impacts. Whilst there are ways to mitigate the negative impacts, this EQIA supports that option 1 should be rejected.

While it is recommended that option 1 is rejected, in response to consultation feedback officers are proposing to explore and implement an alternative location where temporary library and registration services could better be delivered. This could include a single site temporary library and registration service which could include a children's library, public PCs, birth and death registration, the heritage collections and lending book collections.

This EQIA identifies that the impacts across the protected characteristics for options 2 and 4 (which would involve the library service remaining at 2 Grace Hill) and our consultation proposal of moving to FOLCA or an alternative town centre location (option 5) are similar overall (although there would be some different impacts on some individuals and groups).

All could represent viable locations for a town centre library and registration service providing mitigations are put in place as detailed in this EQIA. This EQIA will be further updated as part of the next stage of work to inform a future further key decision on the long-term future of Grace Hill and the location of the Folkestone town centre library and registration service.

The findings of this EQIA support the recommendation that option 4 and 5 continue to be explored, considered and evaluated.

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

Yes

It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?

Yes

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?

No

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

A public consultation ran from 18 July to 11 September 2024. The consultation questionnaire included a question to capture feedback on the consultation stage EQIA and if there was anything else consultees felt we should consider relating to equality and diversity. 22% of consultees provided a response to this question. An analysis of responses can be found within the consultation report. An appendix (Appendix 3) with the full list of responses to this question is attached. It details how the comments have been recognised, considered and incorporated into the EQIA where applicable.

Feedback was captured via a consultation questionnaire which was available on consultation webpage (www.kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary). Hard copies of the consultation material, including the questionnaire were also available in all Folkestone and Hythe district libraries and on request. Easy Read and large print formats were also available. The consultation material and webpage included details of how people could contact KCC to ask a question, request hard copies or an alternative format. In addition, four in person drop-in sessions were held at Wood Avenue Library and 5 Grace Hill. A Word version of the questionnaire was provided on the webpage for people who did not wish to complete the online version.

The consultation was promoted in a mix of digital (for example, social media, emails, website) and non-digital methods (for example, posters, postcards, newspaper advert). Library staff were briefed to promote the consultation to service users and provide support as required. Library public computers could be used to access the consultation website and complete the online questionnaire.

Emails were sent to key stakeholders, including Folkestone & Hythe District Council, the town and parish councils, community groups, local charity organisations, library groups and partners encouraging their participation in the consultation and support promoting it to their residents, members or the people they work with. Local schools were contacted twice, at the beginning and towards the end of the consultation. The consultation period coincided with the annual library school age children's Summer Reading Challenge which is a busy time of year seeing many families visiting libraries.

This EQIA has been updated following the consultation and will be used to inform any decision KCC then takes.

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

Residents of Folkestone and key local stakeholders. In detail:

- Library customers
- Wider Folkestone and Hythe residents
- Folkestone district library staff
- Folkestone and Hythe KCC members
- Folkestone & Hythe District Council
- Key interest/campaign group or key customer contacts
- Local MP
- Creative Folkestone
- Folkestone Town Council, Sandgate Parish Council and Hythe Town Council
- Cheriton Nepalese Group
- Library related groups, such as Books Groups, Baby Rhyme, Books Beyond Words etc.
- Folkestone Community Fridge (currently partners at Wood Avenue Library)
- Living Words (displaced due to Folkestone temp closure)
- Local schools and colleges
- Department for Culture Media and Sport

Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?

Yes. This is version 2 of this EQIA. A consultation stage EQIA (version 1) formed part of the public consultation. We have also completed an EQIA on the temporary provision.

Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?

Yes. Since the temporary closure of the library local people and community groups have been providing feedback through a variety of means and so we recognise the strength and depth of local feeling regarding the 2 Grace Hill building and the importance of Folkestone's town centre library and registration service. We have reviewed all comments provided on the EQIA in the consultation feedback and adapted the EQIA to a new version mindful of the feedback where relevant.

Section C – Impact

Who may be impacted by the activity?

Service users/clients

Service users/clients

Staff/volunteers

Staff/volunteers

Residents/communities/citizens

Residents/communities/citizens

Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?

Yes

Details of Positive Impacts

Following the temporary closure of the 2 Grace Hill building, Folkestone's town centre library and registration services are being delivered from a number of different buildings.

Option 1 Making the temporary provisions permanent does not provide any positive impacts as it would not return a full statutory library service to one location in Folkestone's town centre.

Option 2 and 4

Re-opening Folkestone Library in 2 Grace Hill would ensure that the full town centre service, with equivalent book stock and event space is delivered in one building and available for everyone.

Opening Folkestone Library in 2 Grace Hill with other public and community services, such as the option being discussed with Creative Folkestone, would offer opportunities such as partnership working with other customer and community services. This brings more services to people in one convenient place but also has the potential to increase the take-up of library and other services for those who don't currently use them.

Grace Hill is accessible from the high street and there are nearby public transport services and parking options.

Grace Hill is located in the Folkestone Central ward next to the Folkestone Harbour ward which is an area of high deprivation. The 2 Grace Hill library building is closer to parts of the community who could particularly benefit from accessing library services although there are areas of need across Folkestone. Those living in areas of high deprivation may face greater challenges in accessing services.

The consultation proposal/option 5

A move to a building co-located with other public and community services offers opportunities such as partnership working with other customer and community services. This brings more services to people in one convenient place but also has the potential to increase the take-up of library and other services for those who don't currently use them.

Re-opening Folkestone Library in FOLCA or an alternative town centre location would ensure that the full town centre service, with equivalent book stock and event space is delivered in one building and available for everyone.

Moving to a high street location like FOLCA or another high street building would offer a positive impact for many customers as it would remain accessible to public transport links.

A high street location could be more accessible for those with mobility impairments due to the proximity to other shops and services that people will want to access. The high street is also accessible from public transport and parking options.

Library usage data (Appendix 2) from before 2 Grace Hill temporarily closed, showed that the largest proportion of library users travelled from Folkestone East and Folkestone Central wards which would make the library closer for them if the decision is taken to relocate to FOLCA on the high street. While concern has been raised that a high street location would make the library less accessible for those from the Folkestone Harbour ward it is felt that any high street location would be positive overall given that other services, retail and leisure facilities are also in the town and the distances involved are reasonable.

The consultation proposal and options 2 to 5 would all restore the full town centre library and registration provision.

Consultation proposal and options 2, 4 and 5

Re-instating a full town centre library and registration service would provide the following benefits:

Age/Children/Pregnancy and Maternity

- Early years activities, such as Rhyme Time and Summer Reading Challenge can return to Folkestone town centre providing greater accessibility.
- Birth and death registration appointments would resume in Folkestone town centre.

- Customers would be able to access a full library and registration service/full public computers/activities in the town centre again.
- All of these activities would be available to attend in a town centre location.

Disability/Carers

- Books Beyond Words reading group (reading group for people with learning disabilities) could resume at a town centre location and this option would be discussed with the group.
- Specialist book stock to support those with disabilities would be available again at a town centre library location.

Gender Identity/Sexual Orientation

- Specialist LGBTQIA+ book stock would be available again at town centre library location.

Race

- Dual language and specialist book stock to support those whose first language is not English would be available again at town centre library location.
- Potential for meet and practice English groups to be setup in a town centre location once more.

Marriage and Civil Partnerships

- Notice of marriage and/or civil partnership appointments could return to a town centre library location.

Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for Age?

Yes

Details of negative impacts for Age

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Library customers would need to travel to one of the other Folkestone and Hythe district libraries to access full library services and there is no children's library provision in the temporary town centre library at 5 Grace Hill. The closest libraries to Folkestone town centre are in Wood Avenue or Cheriton. This additional travel could be more of a challenge for elderly customers or those with young children and babies.
- Early years library initiatives such as the Rhyme Time and Playground sessions for pre-schoolers, would not be available in Folkestone town centre because there is not the space to run these in the temporary provision.
- People with young children, young people in their teens or older people may find it difficult to travel to libraries further away.
- Use of public transport may have a cost attached and for those using an older person's bus pass, which has time restrictions.
- No public toilets available at the other district libraries (although provision available in current Folkestone Library - Heritage and Digital Access).

Options 2 and 4 – Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill

- Under option 4 the library may be split over two floors depending on which other organisations or services are co-located within the building. This could be more of a challenge to elderly customers, or those with babies. It should be noted that this was the case before the library was temporarily closed, with the main library downstairs and the local

studies upstairs. How the building is kept accessible would be key to consider moving forward.

- 2 Grace Hill is located at the bottom of a hill, and there is a walk needed to the high street and other local services which could be a challenge for some older customers or those with babies.
- While 2 Grace Hill has nearby parking, the nearest is only available for short term parking.
- 2 Grace Hill is located on a very busy road which could pose accessibility challenges that could disproportionately impact, elderly people and those with young children.

Consultation proposal and option 5 - Move to FOLCA/other town centre location

- The journey from the current building to the proposed new location at FOLCA is uphill. This could be more difficult for some older customers or those with babies if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill.
- The library may be split over two floors depending on who is co-located within the building. This could be more of a challenge to elderly customers or those with babies. How the building is kept accessible would be key to consider moving forward.
- Co-location options may present a busier library space and therefore potential challenges for some in visiting a noisier and busier space.

Mitigating Actions for Age

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Promote digital resources and Home Library Service (HLS) which is where a volunteer can deliver books direct to people's homes.
- Promote our eBook/magazine/newspaper collections all available for free via our website.
- Review of district opening hours and consider making permanent the extended opening hours in place at Wood Avenue and Hythe Libraries.
- Customers can ask to use the staff toilets in locations without public toilets, but these may not be suitable for people with disabilities. This also may be a barrier as customers may be embarrassed to ask.
- The distance from 2 Grace Hill to FOLCA is 0.3 miles. FOLCA is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.

Options 2 and 4 – Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill

- Ensure working lift is available. Like all mechanical lifts it is to be expected that they will have periods of mechanical breakdown.
- In looking at the Creative Folkestone option or any building proposals to look to retain the library at 2 Grace Hill, KCC would ensure that in discussions with Creative Folkestone and/or another partner any building design resulted in a fully accessible library space, and that as much of the public library and registration service space was on the ground floor. It would also be an opportunity to refresh the library layout where possible. We would work to ensure any new design and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.
- For those unable to travel to the Grace Hill location or any nearby libraries we can offer the Home Library Service as an alternative way to access the service.

Consultation proposal and option 5 - Move to FOLCA/other town centre location

- FOLCA is a more central town centre location than 2 Grace Hill as it is on the high street. FOLCA in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (there may be future

changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre). There is a car park located very close to the FOLCA building.

- Ensure clear signage is in place as is the case for 2 Grace Hill and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan would be put in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales.
- For those customers unable to travel to a high street location we can offer the Home Library Service as an alternative way to access the service.
- The data on the home addresses of Folkestone Library customers from 2022 (prior to the temporary closure) was reviewed (Appendix 2) to cross reference with the wards served by Folkestone Library. The data shows that the highest proportion of Folkestone Library users live in the Folkestone Central ward which is closer to FOLCA.
- For the customers travelling from Folkestone Harbour and Folkestone East wards there is already an uphill journey to get to 2 Grace Hill. The distance from 2 Grace Hill to FOLCA is 0.3 miles. FOLCA is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.
- If the service is split over two floors we would ensure a working lift is available and that the building is accessible for all including having accessible public toilets.
- Considering equality feedback, we would look to engage with young people (teens) to ensure the layout is optimal for all. A new layout would be considered in line with ensuring accessibility, this could include quieter spaces, dimmable lighting (not available in Grace Hill). We would work to ensure any new building and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

20. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?

Yes

Details of Negative Impacts for Disability

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- To access a physical library service, Folkestone town centre customers would need to travel to one of the district libraries - the closest are in Wood Avenue or Cheriton. This could be more of a challenge for customers with disabilities, for example, mobility impairments, anxiety, visual impairments or people with learning disabilities, who might struggle to get to a non-town centre location.
- The Books Beyond Words group would remain at Wood Avenue Library meaning potential access issues as described above for this group.
- Book stock which supports different disabilities (for example, Access 2 Books – Braille and Giant Print, Books Beyond Word – supporting people with learning disabilities, Children’s mental health Reading Well book stock etc) may not be readily available at the smaller libraries so customers may have to use the reservation service. This means they may have to pay reservation fees for books they wouldn’t normally have to if there was a full town centre library.

Options 2 and 4 – Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill

- The library may be split over two floors depending on who is co-located within the building which could present a challenge to those with disabilities as there have been times when the lift is out of order for some time.
- In looking at the Creative Folkestone option or any building proposals to look to retain the library at 2 Grace Hill, KCC would ensure that in discussions with Creative Folkestone

and/or another partner any building design resulted in a fully accessible library space, and that as much of the public library and registration service space was on the ground floor. It would also be an opportunity to refresh the library layout where possible. We would work to ensure any new design and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.

- For those unable to travel to the Grace Hill location or any nearby libraries we can offer the Home Library Service as an alternative way to access the service. The service also offers an extensive range of digital resources.
- The Grace Hill building is located towards the bottom of a hill, approximately 0.3 miles from the high street and other local services which could be a challenge for some customers with disabilities.
- Co-location options may present a busier library space and therefore potential challenges for some in visiting a noisier and busier space.
- The Grace Hill building is located on a very busy road which could pose accessibility challenges that could disproportionately impact those with disabilities.

Consultation proposal and option 5 - Move to FOLCA/other town centre location

- FOLCA is towards the top of the high street so the journey from the current building to the proposed new location at FOLCA is uphill. This could be more difficult for someone with mobility issues if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill.
- The library may be split over two floors depending on who is co-located within the building which could present a challenge to those with disabilities.
- For some customers accessing a new and different building can be daunting for example those with neuro diversities.
- Co-location options may present a busier library space and therefore potential challenges for some in visiting a noisier and busier space.

Mitigating actions for Disability

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Wood Avenue and Sandgate libraries can be highlighted as nearby alternatives with automatic door access. Wood Avenue also has extended opening hours.
- Promotion of digital resources and the Home Library Service, which is where a volunteer can deliver books direct to people's homes.
- Promotion of eBook/magazine/newspaper collections all available for free via our website.
- Extra vigilance around which customers may be eligible for an Exempt card, meaning they wouldn't have to pay for reservations.
- A free reservation pickup service is available at the current temporary library provision at 5 Grace Hill, which could be made permanent.

Options 2 and 4 – Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill

- Ensure working lift is available and continued provision of accessible public toilets. The lifts present at 2 Grace Hill have suffered a number of breakdowns and while reported and fixed it is nearing end of its mechanical life so will need to be factored into any building restoration.
- In looking at the Creative Folkestone option or any building proposals to look to retain the library at 2 Grace Hill, KCC would ensure that in discussions with Creative Folkestone and/or another partner any building design resulted in a fully accessible library space, and that as much of the public library and registration service space was on the ground floor. It would also be an opportunity to refresh the library layout where possible. We would work to ensure any new design and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.

- For those unable to travel to the Grace Hill location or any nearby libraries we can offer the Home Library Service as an alternative way to access the service and promotion of eBook/magazine/newspaper collections all available for free via our website.

Consultation proposal and option 5 - Move to FOLCA/other town centre location

- FOLCA is a more central town centre location than 2 Grace Hill as it is on the high street. FOLCA in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. There are car parks located very close to the FOLCA building at Middelburg Place and Bouverie Place which are multi storey car parks with designated disabled spaces.
- Ensure clear signage is in place as is the case for 2 Grace Hill and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan would be put in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales.
- The Home Library Service and the alternative Folkestone and Hythe district libraries offer alternative ways to access the service for those customers unable to travel to a high street location. The service also offers free eBook/magazine/newspaper collections via our website. Further promotion could be carried out to raise awareness of these services.
- The data on the home addresses of Folkestone Library customers from 2022 (prior to the temporary closure) was reviewed (Appendix 2) to cross reference with the wards served by Folkestone Library. The data shows that the highest proportion of Folkestone library users live in the Folkestone Central ward which is closer to FOLCA.
- For the customers travelling from Folkestone Harbour and Folkestone East wards there is already an uphill journey to get to 2 Grace Hill. The distance from 2 Grace Hill to FOLCA is 0.3 miles. FOLCA is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.
- For those with neurodivergent conditions or anxiety when accessing new spaces we would provide a social story for a new location and a virtual tour to allow customers to familiarise themselves with the space before visiting. We would also arrange a virtual tour to be uploaded to our webpage.
- A new layout would be considered in line with ensuring accessibility, this could include quieter spaces, dimmable lighting (not available in Grace Hill). We would work to ensure any new building and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.
- If the service is split over two floors we would ensure a working lift is available and that the building is accessible for all including having accessible public toilets.
- Public/accessible toilets would be part of the service requirements. There may be opportunities to look at further enhancements including a Changing Place facility. We would raise this with Folkestone & Hythe District Council if the decision was taken to progress this proposal.

Responsible Officer for Disability

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

21. Negative Impacts and mitigating actions for Sex

Are there negative impacts for Sex

No

Details of negative impacts for Sex

Not applicable

Mitigating actions for Sex

Not applicable

Responsible Officer for Sex

Not applicable

22. Negative Impacts and mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

Yes

Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Limited specialist LGBTQIA+ book stock in the smaller district libraries so customers are unable to browse collections and would have to reserve and pay a reservation fee.

Options 2 and 4 – Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill - No negative impacts identified. Services would be designed with all needs in mind including book stock that covers the full range of customer preference.

Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Need to review but likely that there would be a need to look at some form of stock collection or continue with the free reservation collection service.
- Promote our eBook/magazine/newspaper collections all available for free via our website.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race

Are there negative impacts for Race

Yes

Negative impacts for Race

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Smaller district libraries have limited ethnic minority group book stock and books in different languages, meaning customers may have to make reservations.

Options 2 and 4 - Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill - No negative impacts identified. Services would be designed with all needs in mind including book stock that covers the full range of customer preference.

Mitigating actions for Race

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Need to review if need to develop the stock collection available in the town centre as no book lending collections available or continue the free reservation collection service.
- Promote our eBook/magazine/newspaper collections all available for free via our website.

Options 2 and 4 - Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill

- In looking at the Creative Folkestone option or any building proposals to look to retain the library at 2 Grace Hill, KCC would ensure that in discussions with Creative Folkestone and/or another partner any building design resulted in a fully accessible library space, and that as much of the public library and registration service space was on the ground floor. It would also be an opportunity to refresh the library layout where possible. We would work to ensure any new design and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.
- For those unable to travel to the Grace Hill location or any nearby libraries we can offer the Home Library Service as an alternative way to access the service.

Consultation proposal - Move to FOLCA

- FOLCA is a more central town centre location than 2 Grace Hill as it is on the high street. FOLCA in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (there may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. There are car parks located very close to the FOLCA building at Middelburg Place and Bouverie Place which are multi storey car parks with designated disabled spaces.
- We would ensure that clear signage is in place as is the case for 2 Grace Hill and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan would be put in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales.
- The Home Library Service and the alternative Folkestone and Hythe district libraries offer alternative ways to access the service for those customers unable to travel to a high street location.
- The data on the home addresses of Folkestone Library customers from 2022 (prior to the temporary closure) was reviewed (Appendix 2) to cross reference with the wards served by Folkestone Library. The data shows that the highest proportion of Folkestone library users live in the Folkestone Central ward which is closer to FOLCA.
- For the customers travelling from Folkestone Harbour and Folkestone East wards there is already an uphill journey to get to 2 Grace Hill. The distance from 2 Grace Hill to FOLCA is 0.3 miles. FOLCA is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

24. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Religion and belief

Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief

No

Negative impacts for Religion and belief

Not applicable

Mitigating actions for Religion and belief

Not applicable

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief

Not applicable

25. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation

Yes

Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- There is a limited provision of specialist LGBTQI+ book stock at the smaller district libraries meaning customer may have to make reservations and pay.

Consultation proposal and options 2 and 4 – Move to FOLCA/Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill - No negative impacts identified. Services will be designed with all needs in mind including book stock that covers the full range of customer preference.

Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Review availability of specialist LGBTQI+ stock in the town centre but a free reservation collection service is available from temporary library provision.
- Promote our eBook/magazine/newspaper collections all available for free via our website.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

26. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity

Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity

Yes

Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- No town centre provision means that customers would need to travel to other libraries to access our physical services. This could be more of a problem for women who are pregnant or mothers who are on maternity leave, who may be unable to travel to another location.
- No Playground and Baby Rhyme Time sessions at a Folkestone town centre location which could result in customers having to travel further/additional cost or not being able to attend.
- The registration of births is not available from town centre location so customers needing to register a birth must travel to their closest alternative registration point in Wood Avenue Library or Hythe library.

Consultation proposal and options 2 and 4 – Move to FOLCA/Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill - No negative impacts identified. Registration of births and Playground and Baby Rhyme Time sessions would be available in a town centre location again. Services would be designed with all needs in mind including book stock that covers the full range of customer preference and ensuring the provision of baby change facilities as at 2 Grace Hill.

Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Review of provision of children’s stock.
- Customers can be directed to services and sessions at the nearest possible library in Wood Avenue, Cheriton, Sandgate or Hythe.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Yes

Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Notice of marriage/civil partnership cannot be given in a town centre library location. Customers would need to travel to Wood Avenue Library.

Consultation proposal and options 2 and 4 – Move to FOLCA/Folkestone Library remains at 2 Grace Hill - No negative impacts identified. Notice of marriage/civil partnerships would be delivered again from a town centre location.

Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Retention of Notice of marriage appointments at Wood Avenue Library.

Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

28. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities

Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities

Yes

Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Without a town centre provision, customers would need to travel to other libraries to access our physical services. This could mean that Carers are unable to access physical library services because they are unable to travel further with the person they are caring for or they are unable to spare the additional travel time/cost.
- Book stock which provides help to Carers and also may support different disabilities may not be available at the smaller district libraries so customers may have to pay and reserve books.

Options 2 and 4 - Library service remains at Grace Hill

- The library may be split over two floors depending on who is co-located within the building which could present a challenge to those with disabilities and therefore their Carers.
- Grace Hill is located towards the bottom of a hill, approximately 0.3 miles from the high street and other local services which could be a challenge for some customers with disabilities and therefore their Carers.

Consultation proposal and option 5 - Move to FOLCA/other town centre location

- The library may be split over two floors depending on who is co-located within the building which could present a challenge to those with disabilities and therefore their Carers.
- FOLCA is towards the top of the high street so the journey from the current building to the proposed new location at FOLCA is uphill. This could be more difficult for someone with mobility issues and their Carers if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill.

Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities

Option 1 - Continue with temporary provision permanently

- Promotion of digital resources and Home Library Service.
- Review of hours across the district. Consider extended opening hours being made permanent in Wood Avenue and Hythe Libraries.
- Vigilance around which customers may be eligible for an Exempt card, meaning they wouldn't have to pay for reservations.
- Review and consider retention of free reservation service.

Options 2 and 4 - Library service remains at Grace Hill

- Ensure working lift is available and continued provision of accessible public toilets. The lift at 2 Grace Hill has suffered a number of breakdowns and while reported and fixed it is nearing end of its mechanical life so will need to be factored into any building restoration.

Consultation proposal - Move to FOLCA

- FOLCA is a more central town centre location than 2 Grace Hill as it is on the high street.
- FOLCA in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station. There may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. There are car parks located very close to the FOLCA building at Middelburg Place and Bouverie Place which are multi storey car parks with designated disabled spaces.

- If the service is split over two floors we would ensure a working lift is available and that the building is accessible for all.
- Ensure clear signage is in place as is the case for 2 Grace Hill and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan would be put in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales.

Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

Appendix 1

Demographic Profile: Folkestone and Hythe

Data primarily sourced from Office of National Statistics (ONS) data from KCC's [website¹](#).

Folkestone is a coastal town in East Kent with a population of 52,279 (2021 census) and sits within the Folkestone & Hythe District which has an overall population of 110,200, forecast to rise to 120,700 by 2027.

Age and Sex

4.5% of the population of Folkestone & Hythe fall within the 0-4 age group, 10.7% are aged 5-14 and 9.5% are aged 15-24. 49.7% of the population are aged 25-64, while 18.7% are aged 65-79, and 6.8% are 80 and older.

48.7% of the population are male, and 51.3% female.

Life expectancy in Folkestone & Hythe is 79.2 years for males and 83.2 for females.

Diversity

88% of the population are White British, and 12% are in ethnic minority groups which are broken down as follows:

Groups	Percentage
White minority groups	4.6%
Asian	3.9%
Black Caribbean or African	0.6%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	1.9%
Other ethnic groups	1%
Total	12%

13.7% of young people aged 0-15 are in ethnic minority groups, as are 14.4% of adults aged 16-64 and 5.3% of older people. 2.3% of households have no adults with English as their main language, while 0.6% have no adults but at least one person aged 3 to 15 who has English as their main language.

48% of people stated their religion is Christian, 1.3% Hindu, 1% Muslim and 0.9% Buddhist. 42.1% stated that they have no religion.

¹ www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-facts-and-figures-about-Kent/area-profiles

Socio-economic groups and Deprivation

The Mosaic data for Folkestone and Hythe from 2022 is as follows:

Mosaic Group	Definition	Percentage of overall population
Group D – Rural Reality	Householders living in inexpensive homes in village communities	13.6%
Group E – Senior Security	Elderly people with assets who are enjoying a comfortable retirement	13.2%
Group C – Country Living	Well off owners in rural locations enjoying the benefits of country life	9.5%
Group H – Aspiring Homemakers	Younger households settling down in housing priced within their means	9.4%
Group L – Vintage Value	Elderly people reliant on support to meet financial or practical needs	9.1%
Group O – Rental Hubs	Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods	8.2%
Group B – Prestige Positions	Established families in large detached homes living upmarket lifestyles	6.6%
Group F – Suburban Stability	Mature suburban owners living in settled lives in mid-range housing	5.8%
Group G – Domestic Success	Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers	5.6%
Group I – Family Basics	Families with limited resources who have to budget to make ends meet	5.4%
Group J – Transient Renters	Single people privately renting low cost homes for the short term	4.7%
Group M – Modest Traditions	Mature homeowners of value homes enjoying stable lifestyles	3.7%
Group N – Urban Cohesion	Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity	3.2%
Group K – Municipal Challenge	Urban renters of social housing facing an array of challenges	1.8%
Group A – City Prosperity	High status city dwellers living in central locations and pursuing careers with high rewards	0.2%

Mosaic is a classification system designed by Experian to profile the characteristics of the UK population. Each household in the UK is classified as belonging to one of 15 groups and 66 types. These groups identify clusters of individuals and households that are as similar as possible to each other, and as different as possible to any other group. They describe the residents of a postcode in terms of their typical demographics, their behaviours, their lifestyle characteristics and their attitudes.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for 2019 reports that Folkestone comprises 67 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Four of which rank among the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. The wards within which these LSOAs sit are Folkestone Harbour, East Folkestone and Folkestone Central.

2 Grace Hill sits within the Harbour Ward and FOLCA is in Folkestone Central.

14.9% of 16 to 64 year olds in the district were recorded as claiming Universal Credit in November 2022, which is 1.6% higher than the average for Kent, and 0.8% higher than the national average. 63.8% of the claimants are not in employment. As of December 2022, Folkestone Harbour, Folkestone Central and East Folkestone wards have the highest rate of unemployment within the Folkestone & Hythe District².

East Folkestone sits within the top 10 wards in Kent with the highest number of children in absolute low-income families³.

Central and Folkestone Harbour ward data from 2021 Census

Ward	% Population Disabled Under the Equality Act
Folkestone Central	25.1%
Folkestone Harbour	22.5%

Ward	% Population Under 16
Folkestone Central	13.5%
Folkestone Harbour	21.5%

Ward	% Population from an Ethnic Minority background*
Folkestone Central	23.9%
Folkestone Harbour	14.5%

* including white ethnic minorities

Ward	% of Population from an Ethnic Minority Background**
Folkestone Central	11.8%
Folkestone Harbour	7.3%

² Kent Analytics: Ward Unemployment Bulletin - www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent/economy-and-employment#tab-5

³ Kent Analytics: Children in Poverty 2022 - www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/7956/Children-in-poverty.pdf

Folkestone Library Statistics

Issues (library items taken out e.g. book loans)

The table below shows issue rankings for Folkestone and Hythe district libraries in relation to the 99 Kent Libraries. The more library loan items taken out the higher the ranking, e.g. 1 equals the highest number of loans in the county, whereas 99 equals the lowest level of loans.

Library	Issue ranking for April to November 2022 ⁴
Hythe	21
Folkestone	25
Cheriton	40
New Romney	54
Lyminge	64
Wood Avenue	72
Sandgate	89
Lydd	94

Active Borrowers

The number of people borrowing items from Folkestone Library had been steadily increasing throughout the year, and from April to November 2022 increased by 18%. In November Folkestone Library had 2,911 active borrowers, while Hythe Library, although issuing more items, had 2,347 active borrowers.

1,402 customers borrowed items during the last full quarter of Folkestone Library being open, and these customers can be broken down into the following age categories:

Age band	No. of customers	Percentage
0-10	536	38.2%
11-19	126	9.0%
20-29	62	4.4%
30-39	141	10.1%
40-49	126	9.0%
50-59	88	6.3%
60 plus	314	22.4%
Age unknown	9	0.6%

Of these customers 45.9% identify as female, 25.9% as male, 0.14% as non-binary/3rd gender while 28.03% did not specify their gender identity.

17 customers (1.21%) indicated that they had a disability as follows:

Disability	No. of customers
Mental health	2
Physical impairment	5
Vision impairment	2
Learning impairment	8

⁴ This period was chosen as this was the last period during the financial year 22/23 when Folkestone Library was open.

Not all customers will provide information on disability when joining the library service, therefore it is likely that the true figure would be more.

Of the 335 customers who indicated their ethnicity, 83% were White British and 17% in ethnic minority groups which can be broken down as follows:

Ethnicity	No. of customers
Asian/Asian British – Chinese	2
Asian/Asian British – Indian	4
Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi	2
Asian/Asian British – Pakistani	3
Asian/Asian British – Other	1
Black/Black British – African	3
Black/Black British – Caribbean	1
Black/Black British – Other	1
Mixed/Multiple – White and Asian	2
Mixed/Multiple – White and Black Caribbean	1
White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller	2
White – Irish	1
White – Other	24
Other ethnic group	10

Visitors

Library	No. of visitors April to November 2022
Folkestone	50,675
Hythe	38,399
Wood Avenue*	22,209
Cheriton	21,397
Sandgate	6,982
New Romney	6,392
Lydd	3,092
Lyminge	3,007

*Wood Avenue Library visitors include customers using the Community Fridge

PC Usage

Use of the public computers (PCs) increased by 36% from April to November 2022 compared with the previous year, with over 6,000 hours of PC usage in total for the year up to December 2022.

Events and Activities

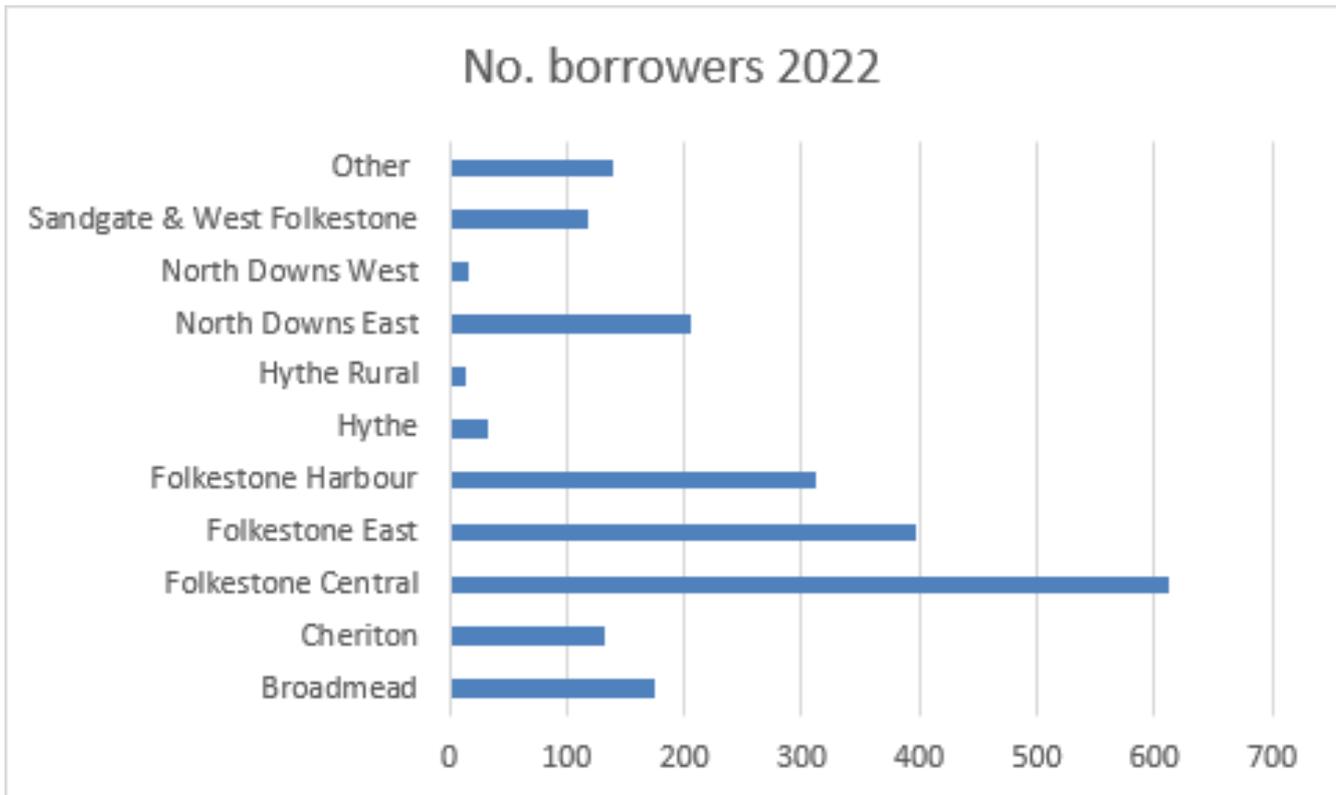
From April to November 2022, Folkestone Library held 141 community events and activities, with 1,464 attendees. These activities include the following:

- Rhyme Time for babies, toddlers and their parents and carers.
- Playground artist-led sessions for babies 0-18 months and their parents and carers.
- Books Beyond Words book group sessions for adults with learning disabilities.
- Meet and Practise English sessions for adults whose first language is not English.

- School Holiday activities in conjunction with the Summer Reading Challenge.
- The library also hosted a series of sessions for the Flux programme with partners Living Words, who were working with 18 to 25 year old LGBTQIA+ people addressing issues around self-harm, ill mental health, and suicide through the creative arts.

Appendix 2

Library borrowers in 2022 cross referenced with wards that are served by Folkestone Library at 2 Grace Hill:



NB - North Downs West would be served mostly by Lylinge Library, and Hythe by Hythe Library. 2 Grace Hill sits within the Harbour ward and FOLCA is in Folkestone Central ward.

The details of the above graph are detailed in the table below:

Ward	Number of Registered Borrowers at Folkestone Library
Folkestone Central	613
Folkestone East	396
Folkestone Harbour	313
North Downs East	205
Broadmead	174
Cheriton	132
Sandgate & West Folkestone	117
Hythe	34
North Downs West	17
Hythe Rural	13
Other (covers customers from other wards/districts who have registered at Folkestone; includes Romney Marsh, Dover, Dartford, Canterbury, Ashford, Maidstone, Thanet, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells),	139

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Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Submission Section A

EQIA Title

Folkestone Library

Responsible Officer

Anna Hendy - GT GC

Type of Activity

Service Change

Service Change

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

Project/Programme

Commissioning/Procurement

No

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

No

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Growth, Environment and Transport

Responsible Service

Libraries, Registration & Archives

Responsible Head of Service

James Pearson

Responsible Director

Stephanie Holt-Castle

Aims and Objectives

Folkestone Library at 2 Grace Hill temporarily closed on 20 December 2022 because it became unsafe for customers and staff. Kent County Council's (KCC) financial situation remains very challenging and means that the Council does not have the budget to repair and reopen the building. The current estimated costs to repair the building is £2.9 million.

Services have been put in place since the temporary closure of the Grace Hill building to minimise the impact of the closure on our customers. These have been kept in place while a long-term town centre location for Folkestone Library has been investigated. The temporary services we have put in place include:

- "Folkestone Library - Heritage and Digital Access" which opened in November 2023 at 5 Grace Hill (previously the Shepway Youth Centre). This is temporarily the location for the complete local studies collection, public PCs, Wi-fi, microfilm reader, photocopying and study space.
- A free reservation service provided at 5 Grace Hill. The service means that customers can order anything from the Kent library catalogue and have it delivered for free to the building for collection.
- The opening hours at the libraries closest to Folkestone town centre have been increased so that there is library provision available six days a week. Hythe Library has increased by 7.5 hours from 37 hours to 44.5 hours per week and Wood Avenue Library has increased by 15.5 hours from 23 hours to 38.5 hours per week. While Folkestone Library was also open

on Sundays the temporary provision offers library opening across six days. Sunday usage was lower compared to the weekdays so to maximise the offer we put the extra hours into the other libraries across Folkestone and Hythe during the week.

- Additional services have been provided at Wood Avenue Library including three additional public computers and increased loanable stock. We have also added this as a location to register a birth or death, in addition to Hythe library.

The temporary provision at 5 Grace Hill was subject to a separate EQIA.

As well as the temporary measures, the following existing library services are also available to help mitigate the impact of the temporary closure:

- E-library service - we have a large digital offer with thousands of free e-books, audiobooks, online newspapers and magazines and other online resources for all ages and interests.
- Library services direct - including the Home Library Service, where we can deliver library items to people if they cannot visit a library, and also our Mobile Library Service.
- Other libraries in the Folkestone and Hythe district - Hythe, Cheriton, Wood Avenue, Lyminge, Sandgate, Lydd, and New Romney.

In January 2025 KCC took a decision to further explore options for 2 Grace Hill as well as any other long-term locations for Folkestone Library. In recognition of the time it would take to confirm and then reopen any permanent location for Folkestone Library the council committed to finding a further town centre location where it could deliver a full (single site) temporary library service until such time as the permanent location was decided and ready.

A location was found on Folkestone High Street for this temporary library, which would also be the permanent home of the Adult Education service. The building is in a central location on the main high street – 14 Sandgate Road – next door to Waterstones Bookshop and opposite Card Factory as below:



This EQIA reviews the impact of the service moving to a further temporary town centre location at 14 Sandgate Road where the full library services will be delivered from this one location. Where adverse impacts are identified, it addresses how such impacts may be mitigated. This EQIA is intended to help ensure the Council complies with its duty to have due regard to the need to consider the following: (a) elimination of discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and (c) foster good relations between persons with who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

The building will be shared between Libraries, Registration and Archives, Community Learning and Skills and have staff office space for other KCC teams. When the library service moves into the new temporary location at 14 Sandgate Road the district libraries will return to their standard

opening hours (those in operation prior to the temporary closure of Grace Hill). Folkestone library heritage and Digital access will close as the service will move into 14 Sandgate Road.

Equality RISK: Low:

Section B – Evidence

Do you have data related to the protected groups of the people impacted by this activity?

Yes (Appendix 1)

It is possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?

Yes

Is there national evidence/data that you can use?

No

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

A public consultation on Folkestone town centre library and registration service provision ran from 18 July to 11 September 2024. The consultation questionnaire included a question to capture feedback on the consultation stage EQIA and if there was anything else consultees felt we should consider relating to equality and diversity. 22% of consultees provided a response to this question. An analysis of responses can be found within the consultation report.

Feedback was captured via a consultation questionnaire which was available on consultation webpage (www.kent.gov.uk/folkestonelibrary). Hard copies of the consultation material, including the questionnaire were also available in all Folkestone and Hythe district libraries and on request. Easy Read and large print formats were also available. The consultation material and webpage included details of how people could contact KCC to ask a question, request hard copies or an alternative format. In addition, four in person drop-in sessions were held at Wood Avenue Library and 5 Grace Hill. A Word version of the questionnaire was provided on the webpage for people who did not wish to complete the online version.

The consultation was promoted in a mix of digital (for example, social media, emails, website) and non-digital methods (for example, posters, postcards, newspaper advert). Library staff were briefed to promote the consultation to service users and provide support as required. Library public computers could be used to access the consultation website and complete the online questionnaire.

Emails were sent to key stakeholders, including Folkestone & Hythe District Council, the town and parish councils, community groups, local charity organisations, library groups and partners encouraging their participation in the consultation and support promoting it to their residents, members or the people they work with. Local schools were contacted twice, at the beginning and towards the end of the consultation. The consultation period coincided with the annual library school age children's Summer Reading Challenge which is a busy time of year seeing many families visiting libraries.

The consultation results showed that many people felt strongly that the community needed a full library services available in the town centre.

A customer engagement is being completed from 8th December 2025 to 10th January 2026 to ask Folkestone library customers which days out of Wednesday and Sunday they would prefer the new temporary library at 14 Sandgate Road to be open. The library's new High Street location and co-location with the Adult Education centre means it's part of the town centre so we want to make sure our opening days reflect when people are most likely to visit in this setting. The results of the vote will then inform the decision we take on opening days at the new temporary library at 14 Sandgate Road.

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

Residents of Folkestone and key local stakeholders. In detail:

- Library customers
- Wider Folkestone and Hythe residents
- Folkestone district library staff
- Folkestone and Hythe KCC members
- Folkestone & Hythe District Council
- Key interest/campaign group or key customer contacts
- Local MP
- Creative Folkestone
- Folkestone Town Council, Sandgate Parish Council and Hythe Town Council
- Cheriton Nepalese Group
- Library related groups, such as Books Groups, Baby Rhyme, Books Beyond Words etc.
- Folkestone Community Fridge (currently partners at Wood Avenue Library)
- Living Words (displaced due to Folkestone temp closure)
- Local schools and colleges
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Has there been a previous Equality Analysis (EQIA) in the last 3 years?

Yes. There has been a full EQIA (version 2) for the Future of Folkestone Library Key decision. A consultation stage EQIA (version 1) formed part of the public consultation. We have also completed an EQIA on the current temporary provision at 5 Grace Hill.

Do you have evidence that can help you understand the potential impact of your activity?

Yes. Since the temporary closure of the library local people and community groups have been providing feedback through a variety of means and so we recognise the strength and depth of local feeling regarding the need for a full library provision in the town centre. This is detailed in the responses from the public consultation.

Section C – Impact

Who may be impacted by the activity?

Service users/clients

Service users/clients

Staff/volunteers

Staff/volunteers

Residents/communities/citizens

Residents/communities/citizens

Are there any positive impacts for all or any of the protected groups as a result of the activity that you are doing?

Yes

Details of Positive Impacts

Re-opening a town centre library provision at 14 Sandgate Road will provide a number of positive impacts.

- This will provide the complete town centre service—including book collections and event space—in one accessible building. The full Adult Fiction and Non-fiction selections will return from nearby branches.
- It will return a full children’s library to Folkestone town centre providing books, information as well as events and activities such as Baby Bounce and Rhyme Sessions and craft events which have only been available at nearby branch libraries since the temporary closure at 2 Grace Hill.
- A move to a building co-located with other public and community services offers opportunities to better serve the public within one location. This brings more services to

people in one convenient place but also has the potential to increase the take-up of library and other services for those who don't currently use them.

- It may bring more customers to the service in the new high street location where the services delivered in the library will be more visible through large windows facing onto the high street
- The service will be able to advertise the services available to members of the community passing by on the high street visiting other essential services such as the post office and bank.
- 14 Sandgate Road is accessible from the high street and there are nearby public transport services and parking options.
- 14 Sandgate Road's closest car parks with disabled bays are at Shellons Street (2 disabled bays and run by FHDC offering free parking with a blue badge for 3 hours) which is 0.1 miles/4 minute walk away or NCP Bouverie Place (26 disabled bays) which is 0.2 miles/3 minute walk away. In comparison the closest car parks with disabled bays to 2 Grace Hill are at Shellons Street which 0.1 miles/3 minute walk or Payers Park (4 disabled bays and run by FHDC offering free parking with a blue badge for 3 hours) which is 0.1 miles/2 minute walk away.
- 14 Sandgate Road is located in the Folkestone Central ward next to the Folkestone Harbour ward which is an area of high deprivation. 14 Sandgate Road is close to parts of the community who could particularly benefit from accessing library services although there are areas of need across Folkestone.
- A high street location could be more accessible for those with mobility impairments due to the proximity to other shops and services that people will want to access. The high street is also accessible from public transport and parking options.
- The library at 14 Sandgate Road will be all on one level providing an accessible space for all.

Library usage data (Appendix 2) from before 2 Grace Hill temporarily closed, showed that the largest proportion of library users travelled from Folkestone East and Folkestone Central wards which would make the library closer for them at 14 Sandgate Road. While concern has been raised that a high street location would make the library less accessible for those from the Folkestone Harbour ward it is felt that any high street location would be positive overall given that other services, retail and leisure facilities are also in the town and the distances involved are reasonable. There are car parks and bus stops nearby so can be accessed as well as any other town centre location.

The return of a full town centre library and registration service at 14 Sandgate Road would provide the following benefits:

Age/Children/Pregnancy and Maternity

- Early years activities, such as Rhyme Time and Summer Reading Challenge can return to Folkestone town centre providing greater accessibility.
- Birth and death registration appointments would resume in Folkestone town centre.
- Customers would be able to access a full library and registration service/full public computers/activities in the town centre again.
- All of these activities would be available to attend in a town centre location.
- The library service will be delivered from one floor with no steps creating an accessible space for all.

Disability/Carers

- Books Beyond Words reading group (reading group for people with learning disabilities) could resume at a town centre location and this option would be discussed with the group.

- Specialist book stock to support those with disabilities would be available again at a town centre library location.
- The library service will be delivered from one floor with no steps creating an accessible space for all.

Gender Identity/Sexual Orientation

- Specialist LGBTQIA+ book stock would be available again at town centre library location.

Race

- Dual language and specialist book stock to support those whose first language is not English would be available again at town centre library location.
- Potential for meet and practice English groups to be setup in a town centre location once more.

Negative impacts and Mitigating Actions

19. Negative Impacts and Mitigating actions for Age

Are there negative impacts for Age?

Yes

Details of negative impacts for Age

- The journey from 2 Grace Hill and the current temporary library at 5 Grace Hill to 14 Sandgate Road is uphill. This could be more difficult for some older customers, some carers who might wish to visit with their cared for family member/client, or those with babies if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill.
- The co-location may present a busier library space and therefore potential challenges for some in visiting a noisier and busier space.
- The ward in which 14 Sandgate Road is located has a lower proportion of individuals aged under 16 (18%) than the ward in which Grace Hill is located (24%). A move to 14 Sandgate Road could adversely affect young people, for whom access to library services may be particularly important, who live closer to the Grace Hill building.
- Opening hours may not be convenient for everyone.

Mitigating Actions for Age

- 14 Sandgate Road is a more central town centre location than Grace Hill as it is on the high street. 14 Sandgate Road in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. There is a car park located very close to 14 Sandgate Road.
- Ensure clear signage is in place for the temporary library location at 14 Sandgate Road and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan is in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales. This includes a customer engagement asking library users which days out of Wednesday and Sunday they would like the service to be open and signage on the 14 Sandgate Road building advertising that the Library and Adult Education services are 'coming soon'.
- For those customers unable to travel to a high street location we can offer the Home Library Service as an alternative way to access the service.
- The data on the home addresses of Folkestone Library customers from 2022 (prior to the temporary closure) was reviewed (Appendix 2) to cross reference with the wards served by Folkestone Library. The data shows that the highest proportion of Folkestone Library users live in the Folkestone Central ward which is closer to 14 Sandgate Road.

- For the customers travelling from Folkestone Harbour and Folkestone East wards there is already an uphill journey to get to Grace Hill. The distance from Grace Hill to 14 Sandgate Road is 0.2 miles. 14 Sandgate Road is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.
- The library will all be on the ground floor so will provide accessible service to all including having accessible public toilets.
- The layout of the library has been considered to include quieter spaces. We would work to ensure any new building and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.
- The opening hours will be the same number of opening hours as was in place at the Grace Hill Library. We are engaging with customers about whether the library is open on a Wednesday or Sunday. The service does offer a range of opening hours and times to cater for all age ranges including Saturday opening hours if people cannot visit during the week, after school time for example.

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

20. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?

Yes

Details of Negative Impacts for Disability

- The journey from 2 Grace Hill and the current temporary library at 5 Grace Hill to 14 Sandgate Road is uphill. This could be more difficult for customers with reduced mobility if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill.
- For some customers accessing a new and different building can be daunting for example those with neuro diversities.
- Co-location options may present a busier library space and therefore potential challenges for some in visiting a noisier and busier space.
- The ward in which 14 Sandgate Road is located has a lower proportion of individuals with a highly limiting disability (9%) than the ward in which Grace Hill is located (12%). A move to 14 Sandgate Road could adversely affect those disabled people in the latter ward.

Mitigating actions for Disability

- 14 Sandgate Road is a more central town centre location than Grace Hill as it is on the high street. 14 Sandgate Road in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. 14 Sandgate Road's closest car parks with disabled bays are at Shellons Street (2 disabled bays and run by FHDC offering free parking with a blue badge for 3 hours) which is 0.1 miles/4 minute walk away or NCP Bouverie Place (26 disabled bays) which is 0.2 miles/3 minute walk away.
- Ensure clear signage is in place at 14 Sandgate Road and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan is in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales. This includes a customer engagement asking library users which days they would like the service to be open and signage on the 14 Sandgate Road building advertising that the Library and Adult Education services are 'coming soon'
- The Home Library Service, online library services and the alternative Folkestone and Hythe district libraries offer alternative ways to access the service for those customers unable to

travel to a high street location. The service offers free eBook/magazine/newspaper collections via our website. Further promotion could be carried out to raise awareness of these services. A Home Library Service promotional campaign is currently underway.

- The data on the home addresses of Folkestone Library customers from 2022 (prior to the temporary closure) was reviewed (Appendix 2) to cross reference with the wards served by Folkestone Library. The data shows that the highest proportion of Folkestone library users live in the Folkestone Central ward which is closer to 14 Sandgate Road.
- For the customers travelling from Folkestone Harbour and Folkestone East wards there is already an uphill journey to get to 2 Grace Hill. The distance from 2 Grace Hill to 14 Sandgate Road is 0.2 miles. 14 Sandgate Road is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.
- For those with neurodivergent conditions or anxiety when accessing new spaces we would provide a social story for a new location. The social story is a social learning tool supporting individuals with neurodivergence to clarify and explain social situations aiming to reduce anxiety in unfamiliar locations and promote understanding of social situations and expectations. We would also investigate the option of a virtual tour of the building to further allow customers to familiarise themselves with the space before visiting.
- The layout of the building has been considered to ensure accessibility, including quieter spaces. We will work to ensure any new building and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.
- The library will all be on the ground floor so will provide accessible service to all including having accessible public toilets.
- The opening hours will be the same number of opening hours as was in place at the Grace Hill Library. We are engaging with customers about whether the library is open on a Wednesday or Sunday. The service does offer a range of opening hours and times to cater for all including Saturday opening hours if people cannot visit during the week for example.

Responsible Officer for Disability

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

21. Negative Impacts and mitigating actions for Sex

Are there negative impacts for Sex

No

Details of negative impacts for Sex

Not applicable

Mitigating actions for Sex

Not applicable

Responsible Officer for Sex

Not applicable

22. Negative Impacts and mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Are there negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

NO

Negative impacts for Gender identity/transgender

Not applicable

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race

Are there negative impacts for Race

Yes

Negative impacts for Race

- The ward in which 14 Sandgate Road is located has a lower proportion of individuals of a non-white ethnic background (8%) than the ward in which Grace Hill is located (12%). A move to 14 Sandgate Road could adversely affect those people of a non-white ethnic background, for whom access to library services may be particularly important, in the latter ward.

Mitigating actions for Race

- 14 Sandgate Road is a more central town centre location than Grace Hill as it is on the high street. 14 Sandgate Road in comparison to Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (there may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. 14 Sandgate Road's closest car parks with disabled bays are at Shellons Street (2 disabled bays and run by FHDC offering free parking with a blue badge for 3 hours) which is 0.1 miles/4 minute walk away or NCP Bouverie Place (26 disabled bays) which is 0.2 miles/3 minute walk away.
- We will ensure that clear signage is in place and raise awareness of the new location at 14 Sandgate Road. A communications plan is in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales. This includes a customer engagement asking library users which days they would like the service to be open and signage on the 14 Sandgate Road building advertising that the Library and Adult Education services are 'coming soon'
- The Home Library Service and the alternative Folkestone and Hythe district libraries offer alternative ways to access the service for those customers unable to travel to a high street location.
- The data on the home addresses of Folkestone Library customers from 2022 (prior to the temporary closure) was reviewed (Appendix 2) to cross reference with the wards served by Folkestone Library. The data shows that the highest proportion of Folkestone library users live in the Folkestone Central ward which is closer to 14 Sandgate Road.
- For the customers travelling from Folkestone Harbour and Folkestone East wards there is already an uphill journey to get to 2 Grace Hill. The distance from 2 Grace Hill to 14 Sandgate Road is 0.2 miles. 14 Sandgate Road is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities.
- The opening hours will be the same number of opening hours as was in place at the Grace Hill Library. We are engaging with customers about whether the library is open on a Wednesday or Sunday. The service does offer a range of opening hours and times to cater for all, including Saturday opening hours if people cannot visit during the week for example.

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

24. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Religion and belief

Are there negative impacts for Religion and belief

No

Negative impacts for Religion and belief

Not applicable

Mitigating actions for Religion and belief

Not applicable

Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Religion and Belief

Not applicable

25. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation

Are there negative impacts for Sexual Orientation

No
Negative impacts for Sexual Orientation
Not applicable
Mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Sexual Orientation
Not applicable
26. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Are there negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
Yes
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The journey from 2 Grace Hill and the current temporary library at 5 Grace Hill to 14 Sandgate Road is uphill. This could be more difficult for pregnant customers or those with babies if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill. • Opening hours may not be convenient for everyone.
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 Sandgate Road is a more central town centre location than Grace Hill as it is on the high street. 14 Sandgate Road in comparison to 2 Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. There are car parks located very close to 14 Sandgate Road at Shellons Street and Bouverie Place. • 14 Sandgate Road is located near many other local services on the high street, such as the Post Office, banks, supermarkets and shops meaning that customers would be able to combine a visit to the library with other activities. • The number of opening hours at 14 Sandgate Road will remain the same as opening hours at the Grace Hill Library but we are engaging with customers about whether the library is open on a Wednesday or Sunday. The service does offer a range of opening hours and times including Saturday opening hours if people cannot visit during the week.
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Yes
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice of marriage appointments will not be delivered from the new temporary library at 14 Sandgate Road.
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice of marriage appointments will continue to be delivered at Wood Avenue Library.
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn
28. Negative impacts and mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities

Yes

Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities

- 14 Sandgate Road is on the high street so the journey from the current building to 14 Sandgate Road is uphill. This could be more difficult for someone with mobility issues and their Carers if they live closer to the current location on Grace Hill.
- Opening hours may not be convenient for everyone.

Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities

- 14 Sandgate Road is a more central town centre location than Grace Hill as it is on the high street.
- 14 Sandgate Road in comparison to Grace Hill is closer to the bus station (There may be future changes to the provision which lead to more bus stops in the town centre) and equal distance to the train station. 14 Sandgate Road's closest car parks with disabled bays are at Shellons Street (2 disabled bays and run by FHDC offering free parking with a blue badge for 3 hours) which is 0.1 miles/4 minute walk away or NCP Bouverie Place (26 disabled bays) which is 0.2 miles/3 minute walk away.
- The layout of the building has been considered to ensure accessibility, including quieter spaces. We will work to ensure any new building and layout has accessibility for all as a key requirement of the design process.
- The library will all be on the ground floor so will provide accessible service to all including having accessible public toilets.
- Ensure clear signage is in place and raise awareness of the new location. A communications plan is in place to raise awareness of the new location, promote the services available and inform people of timescales. This includes a customer engagement asking library users which days they would like the service to be open and signage on the 14 Sandgate Road building advertising that the Library and Adult Education services are 'coming soon'.
- The opening hours will be the same number of opening hours as was in place at the Grace Hill Library. We are engaging with customers about whether the library is open on a Wednesday or Sunday. The service does offer a range of opening hours and times to cater for all age ranges including Saturday opening hours if people cannot visit during the week, after school time for example.

Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities

Anna Hendy and Donna-Marie Dunn

Appendix 1

Demographic Profile: Folkestone and Hythe

Data primarily sourced from Office of National Statistics (ONS) data from KCC's [website](#)¹.

Folkestone is a coastal town in East Kent with a population of 52,279 (2021 census), and sits within the Folkestone & Hythe District which has an overall population of 110,200, forecast to rise to 120,700 by 2027.

Age and Sex

4.5% of the population of Folkestone & Hythe fall within the 0-4 age group, 10.7% are aged 5-14 and 9.5% are aged 15-24. 49.7% of the population are aged 25-64, while 18.7% are aged 65-79, and 6.8% are 80 and older.

48.7% of the population are male, and 51.3% female.

Life expectancy in Folkestone & Hythe is 79.2 years for males and 83.2 for females.

Diversity

88% of the population are White British, and 12% are in ethnic minority groups which are broken down as follows:

Groups	Percentage
White minority groups	4.6%
Asian	3.9%
Black Caribbean or African	0.6%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	1.9%
Other ethnic groups	1%
Total	12%

13.7% of young people aged 0-15 are in ethnic minority groups, as are 14.4% of adults aged 16-64 and 5.3% of older people. 2.3% of households have no adults with English as their main language, while 0.6% have no adults but at least one person aged 3 to 15 who has English as their main language.

48% of people stated their religion is Christian, 1.3% Hindu, 1% Muslim and 0.9% Buddhist. 42.1% stated that they have no religion.

¹ www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/statistics-and-figures-about-Kent/area-profiles

Socio-economic groups and Deprivation

The Mosaic data for Folkestone and Hythe from 2022 is as follows:

Mosaic Group	Definition	Percentage of overall population
Group D – Rural Reality	Householders living in inexpensive homes in village communities	13.6%
Group E – Senior Security	Elderly people with assets who are enjoying a comfortable retirement	13.2%
Group C – Country Living	Well off owners in rural locations enjoying the benefits of country life	9.5%
Group H – Aspiring Homemakers	Younger households settling down in housing priced within their means	9.4%
Group L – Vintage Value	Elderly people reliant on support to meet financial or practical needs	9.1%
Group O – Rental Hubs	Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods	8.2%
Group B – Prestige Positions	Established families in large detached homes living upmarket lifestyles	6.6%
Group F – Suburban Stability	Mature suburban owners living in settled lives in mid-range housing	5.8%
Group G – Domestic Success	Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers	5.6%
Group I – Family Basics	Families with limited resources who have to budget to make ends meet	5.4%
Group J – Transient Renters	Single people privately renting low cost homes for the short term	4.7%
Group M – Modest Traditions	Mature homeowners of value homes enjoying stable lifestyles	3.7%
Group N – Urban Cohesion	Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity	3.2%
Group K – Municipal Challenge	Urban renters of social housing facing an array of challenges	1.8%
Group A – City Prosperity	High status city dwellers living in central locations and pursuing careers with high rewards	0.2%

Mosaic is a classification system designed by Experian to profile the characteristics of the UK population. Each household in the UK is classified as belonging to one of 15 groups and 66 types. These groups identify clusters of individuals and households that are as similar as possible to each other, and as different as possible to any other group. They describe the residents of a postcode in terms of their typical demographics, their behaviours, their lifestyle characteristics and their attitudes.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for 2019 reports that Folkestone comprises 67 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Four of which rank among the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. The wards within which these LSOAs sit are Folkestone Harbour, East Folkestone and Folkestone Central.

2 Grace Hill sits within the Harbour Ward and FOLCA is in Folkestone Central.

14.9% of 16-64 year olds in the district were recorded as claiming Universal Credit in November 2022, which is 1.6% higher than the average for Kent, and 0.8% higher than the national average. 63.8% of the claimants are not in employment. As of December 2022, Folkestone Harbour, Folkestone Central and East Folkestone wards have the highest rate of unemployment within the Folkestone & Hythe District².

East Folkestone sits within the top 10 wards in Kent with the highest number of children in absolute low-income families³.

² Kent Analytics: Ward Unemployment Bulletin - www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/information-and-data/facts-and-figures-about-Kent/economy-and-employment#tab-5

³ Kent Analytics: Children in Poverty 2022 - www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/7956/Children-in-poverty.pdf

Folkestone Library Statistics

Issues (library items taken out e.g. book loans)

The table below shows issue rankings for Folkestone and Hythe district libraries in relation to the 99 Kent Libraries. The more library loan items taken out the higher the ranking, e.g. 1 equals the highest number of loans in the county, whereas 99 equals the lowest level of loans.

Library	Issue ranking for April to November 2022 ⁴
Hythe	21
Folkestone	25
Cheriton	40
New Romney	54
Lyminge	64
Wood Avenue	72
Sandgate	89
Lydd	94

Active Borrowers

The number of people borrowing items from Folkestone Library had been steadily increasing throughout the year, and from April to November 2022 increased by 18%. In November Folkestone Library had 2,911 active borrowers, while Hythe Library, although issuing more items, had 2,347 active borrowers.

1,402 customers borrowed items during the last full quarter of Folkestone Library being open, and these customers can be broken down into the following age categories:

Age band	No. of customers	Percentage
0-10	536	38.2%
11-19	126	9.0%
20-29	62	4.4%
30-39	141	10.1%
40-49	126	9.0%
50-59	88	6.3%
60 plus	314	22.4%
Age unknown	9	0.6%

Of these customers 45.9% identify as female, 25.9% as male, 0.14% as non-binary/3rd gender while 28.03% did not specify their gender identity.

17 customers (1.21%) indicated that they had a disability as follows:

Disability	No. of customers
Mental health	2
Physical impairment	5
Vision impairment	2

⁴ This period was chosen as this was the last period during the financial year 22/23 when Folkestone Library was open.

Learning impairment	8
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Not all customers will provide information on disability when joining the library service, therefore it is likely that the true figure would be more.

Of the 335 customers who indicated their ethnicity, 83% were White British and 17% in ethnic minority groups which can be broken down as follows:

Ethnicity	No. of customers
Asian/Asian British – Chinese	2
Asian/Asian British – Indian	4
Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi	2
Asian/Asian British – Pakistani	3
Asian/Asian British – Other	1
Black/Black British – African	3
Black/Black British – Caribbean	1
Black/Black British – Other	1
Mixed/Multiple – White and Asian	2
Mixed/Multiple – White and Black Caribbean	1
White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller	2
White – Irish	1
White – Other	24
Other Ethnic group	10

Visitors

Library	No. of visitors April to November 2022
Folkestone	50,675
Hythe	38,399
Wood Avenue*	22,209
Cheriton	21,397
Sandgate	6,982
New Romney	6,392
Lydd	3,092
Lyminge	3,007

*Wood Avenue Library visitors include customers using the Community Fridge

PC Usage

Use of the public computers (PCs) increased by 36% from April to November 2022 compared with the previous year, with over 6,000 hours of PC usage in total for the year up to December 2022.

Events and Activities

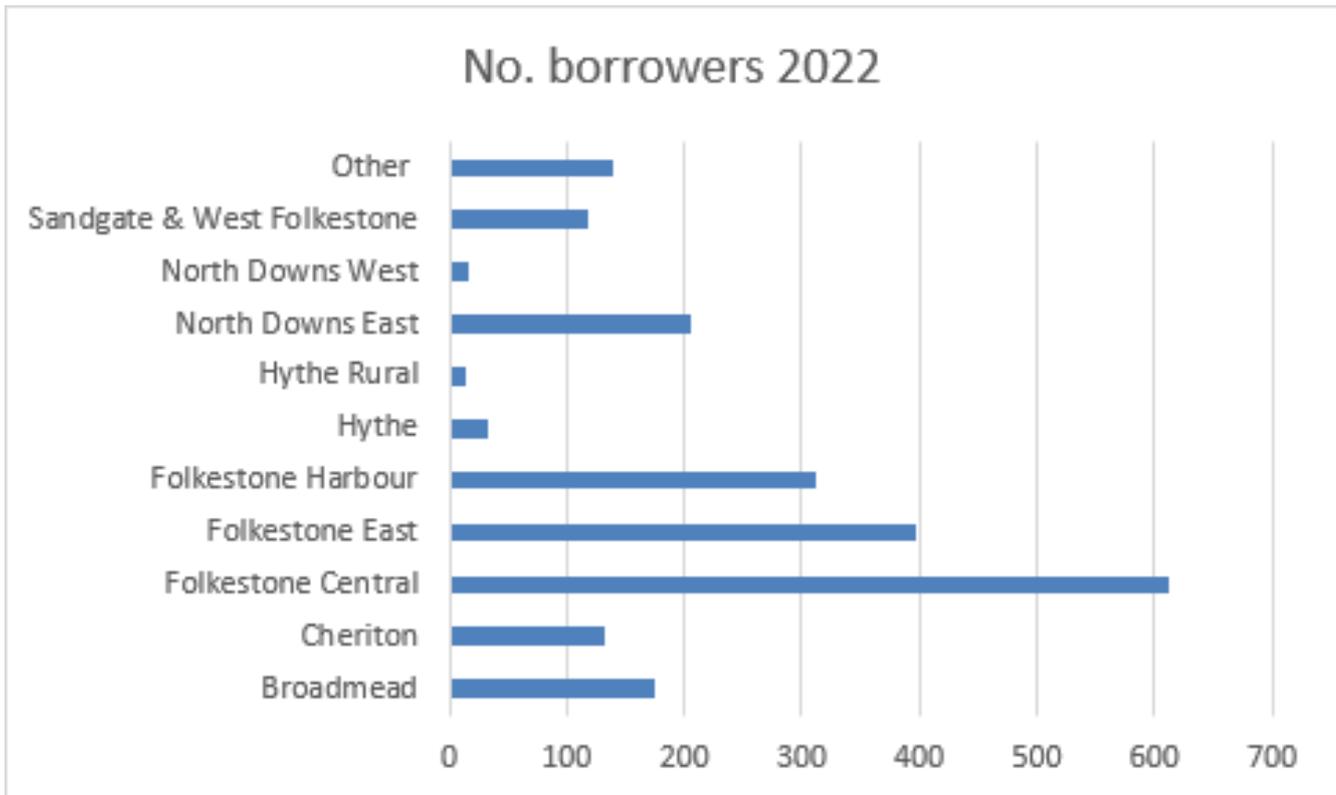
From April to November 2022, Folkestone Library held 141 community events and activities, with 1,464 attendees. These activities include the following:

- Rhyme Time for babies, toddlers and their parents and carers.

- Playground artist-led sessions for babies 0-18 months and their parents and carers.
- Books Beyond Words book group sessions for adults with learning disabilities.
- Meet and Practise English sessions for adults whose first language is not English.
- School Holiday activities in conjunction with the Summer Reading Challenge.
- The Library also hosted a series of sessions for the Flux programme with partners Living Words, who were working with 18-25 year old LGBTQIA+ people addressing issues around self-harm, ill mental health and suicide through the creative arts.

Appendix 2

Library borrowers in 2022 cross referenced with wards that are served by Folkestone Library at 2 Grace Hill:



NB - North Downs West would be served mostly by Lylinge Library, and Hythe by Hythe Library. 2 Grace Hill sits within the Harbour ward and FOLCA is in Folkestone Central ward.

The details of the above graph are detailed in the table below:

Ward	Number of Registered Borrowers at Folkestone Library
Folkestone Central	613
Folkestone East	396
Folkestone Harbour	313
North Downs East	205
Broadmead	174
Cheriton	132
Sandgate & West Folkestone	117
Hythe	34
North Downs West	17
Hythe Rural	13
Other (covers customers from other wards/districts who have registered at Folkestone; includes Romney Marsh, Dover, Dartford, Canterbury, Ashford, Maidstone, Thanet, Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells),	139