

EQIA Submission – ID Number

Section A

EQIA Title

Disposal of The Old Rectory Northfleet as an going concern

Responsible Officer

Mark Reeves - GT GC

Approved by (Note: approval of this EqIA must be completed within the EqIA App)

Steve Samson - GT GC

Type of Activity

Service Change

No

Service Redesign

No

Project/Programme

No

Commissioning/Procurement

No

Strategy/Policy

No

Details of other Service Activity

Seeking authority to dispose of surplus property and transferring its functions as a going concern

Accountability and Responsibility

Directorate

Growth Environment and Transport

Responsible Service

Economy

Responsible Head of Service

Steve Samson - GT GC

Responsible Director

Stephanie Holt-Castle - GT GC

Aims and Objectives

Context - The Old Rectory, Northfleet is a KCC-owned facility, managed by an external service supplier and has offered high quality office space to SMEs since 2009. In September 2015 the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee approved the procurement of management services at the Centre, to test the market to ensure value for money. Following a Public Contract Regulations-compliant procurement process a seven-year contract was awarded to “Basepoint Centres Ltd” in December 2015 with provision for a extension of up to four years. Following a recommendation from GEDCCC and a Cabinet Member for Economic Development decision, the original contract was extended for one year to allow the centre to continue to provide business support services to local firms and enable the KCC to undertake a review of options for its future.

As of September 2024, following the review of options, the county council is seeking a cabinet decision to dispose of the The Old Rectory and transferring its functions (as a business centre) as a going concern.

In terms of the day to day operations of the site, an EqIA was published in 2023, with low/no negative impact on Protected Groups. Some sections of the Grade II* listed section of the centre are less accessible to those with a physical disability. KCC and Basepoint have made reasonable adjustments to this section of the property (without breaching the law protecting listed buildings) to minimise any negative impacts for

disabled customers or employees. The assessment also identifies positive impacts on Protected Groups. The previous assessment was in 2019.

The business centre is marketed using a variety of media through relevant support organisations to ensure information about the centre and the service it provides reaches the widest variety of people. Access to physical space at the centre is offered on “first come, first served” basis. When the centre is 100% occupied, the business centre operates a waiting list, and space is offered to the business placed first on the list. The decision to issue a licence to a business is based on financial and business information submitted by the applicant to the business centre. The centre does not discriminate against any Protected Group, and is actively providing a safe and secure, managed environment to all Licensees.

The centre maintains a strict policy for Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviour (including discrimination or harassment when related to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010). This policy forms part of the licensee handbook and all licensees are required to comply with the Act.

As part of the procurement process in 2015, Basepoint was required to complete a diversity questionnaire as part of the tender process, where the potential supplier is assessed on equalities issues. In addition, Basepoint by contract is required to provide services consistent with the Kent County Council’s Equality and Diversity Statement.

Aims and objectives - the aim and objective of this EqIA is to ensure that the disposal of the site as a going concern will not lead to any disadvantages for groups with protected characteristics.

Summary of equality impact - This EqIA has been carried out to consider any impact that the disposal of the The Old Rectory site as a going concern will have on Protected Groups. It is deemed that property disposal process will have low or no negative impact as its functions as the business centre will be transferred to the new owner as a going concern and so will continue operating as usual.

However, some internal actions could be taken, to establish the terms and conditions any buyer would need to adhere to, to ensure that the centre continues to provide services that do not discriminate against any Protected Group, and is actively providing a safe and secure, managed business environment to all Licensees.

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?

Yes

Have you consulted with stakeholders?

Yes

Who have you involved, consulted and engaged with?

We are required to consult with the local division Member as per the Council's constitution. Both Members for Northfleet and West Gravesham have been notified of Council's intention to consider options for the future of The Old Rectory.

As part of the Key Decision process, other members of the authority are made aware of the decision to be taken and are able to raise queries in respect of the proposed decision.

It is our current intention that formal Member consultation will take place at the next Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 11th September 2024

The service provider has been notified of the Council's intention to consider options for the future of The Old Rectory.

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

Yes

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

Yes

Section C – Impact

Who may be impacted by the activity?

Service Users/clients

Service users/clients

Staff

Staff/Volunteers

Residents/Communities/Citizens

No

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

The Old Rectory Business Centre has a positive impact on the local community, increasing access to affordable office space and good quality business support for small and new businesses in the Gravesham area. The centre provides support for businesses to grow and expand, creating opportunities for job creation in the local area. The service/facility offers equal opportunities for all licensees.

The property is compliant with the Equalities ACT 2010 and provides a safe and secure environment for all licensees.

The centre is marketed using a variety of media and relevant support organisations to ensure information about the centre and the service it provides reaches the widest variety of people. Basepoint/Old Rectory involves a wide range of partners in providing a business service that benefits all. The Centre also offers “virtual office” facilities, allowing licensees (particularly those with disabilities) to work from home (or at an alternative work space) and benefit from the wide range of business services that the Old Rectory provides without having to travel/and or visit the centre.

Age - The service/facility offers equal opportunities for all. For older people, according to the ONS, nationwide there has been an increase in first-time entrepreneurs over the age of 50, and the availability of flexible business units/business services, such as is provided by The Old Rectory, is beneficial to this group.

Disability - The service/facility offers equal opportunities for all. The property is DDA compliant, and most of the centre is accessible to wheelchair users. Units are flexible spaces and can be adapted to benefit the user. Licensees provide their own furniture/equipment including any specialised ICT equipment and adapted furniture if required. The Centre offers “virtual office” facilities, allowing licensees (including those with disabilities) to work from home (or an alternative work space) and benefit from the wide range of business services that the Old Rectory provides (including a business address and telephone number, mailbox packages, telephone answering service, access to meeting rooms and drop in lounges, etc).

Gender - The service/facility offers equal opportunities for all. Basepoint organises events that are free and open to all kinds of business, offering them the opportunity to meet new people, to build on existing business relationships and to generate new leads. Professional Women in Business Networking is one such event that provides an effective platform for both women in business and professions within Gravesham and wider Kent, to meet, share ideas and experiences and to learn, as well as the opportunity to do business together.

Race - The service/facility offers equal opportunities for all. In terms of providing business support to people from all backgrounds and communities the centre maintains contacts with translation services and race business support organisations. Basepoint also advises businesses to make checks to ensure that a business name does not have any unfortunate meanings in other languages.

Carer's Responsibilities and Pregnancy and Maternity - The service/facility offers equal opportunities for all. Offering equal opportunities for all. The Centre also offers "virtual office" facilities, allowing licensees (including those with carer's responsibilities) to work from home and benefit from the wide range of business services that the Old Rectory provides (including a business address and telephone number, mailbox packages, telephone answering service, access to meeting rooms and drop in lounges, etc).

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

For young people, to start a business legally in the UK you must be at least 16 years of age (and 18 years of age to sign some legal documents).

Mitigating Actions for Age

There is potential to develop programmes with local schools. One business owner located at the Old Rectory regularly visits local schools to engage with young people to inspire them into entrepreneurship.

Responsible Officer for Mitigating Actions – Age

Mark Reeves

20. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Disability

Are there negative impacts for Disability?

Yes

Details of Negative Impacts for Disability

The Old Rectory, Northfleet is a Grade II* listed property with a 20th Century annex. The building is DDA compliant, with access to all floors via a fully maintained lift, and most of the building is accessible to wheelchair users. Some sections of the Grade II* listed section of the centre are less accessible to wheelchair users and to those with a physical disability which prevents them from using stairs.

Mitigating actions for Disability

KCC and the service provider have made reasonable adjustments to this section of the property (without breaching the law protecting listed buildings) to minimise any negative impacts for disabled customers or employees. Units are flexible spaces and can be adapted to benefit the user. Licensees provide their own furniture/equipment including any specialised ICT equipment and adapted furniture if required. The Centre offers "virtual office" facilities, allowing licensees (including those with disabilities) to work from home (or an alternative work space) and benefit from the wide range of business services.

Responsible Officer for Disability

Mark Reeves

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
The centre provides separate men's and women's toilet facilities, as well as a gender-neutral accessible toilet.
Mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
No known negative impact. However, staff training could include awareness-raising regarding gender identity.
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Gender identity/transgender
Mark Reeves
23. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Race
Are there negative impacts for Race
Yes
Negative impacts for Race
Northfleet has a significant Asian population - approximately 15% (over 10% for Gravesham). In Northfleet approximately 7% of the language spoken is Asian. At this stage, it is not known if the centre is fully representative of Gravesham's ethnically diverse community or whether any licensees from this Protected group (and specifically from the local Asian population) as the service provider does not currently collect this data.
There is no known negative impact relating to this group. However, the Centre is designed for use by all the community. Signage at the centre is solely in English, as is the text on the website - this may have a low adverse effect on certain race groups.
Mitigating actions for Race
Request that the service provider collect equalities data from licensees. A review of equality data should tell us if a more targeted approach to promoting the centre/services to particular race groups is required, if it is shown that a particular group is underrepresented at the centre.
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Race
Mark Reeves
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
No
Negative impacts for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for mitigating actions for Pregnancy and Maternity
Not Applicable
27. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Are there negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
No
Negative impacts for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Marriage and Civil Partnerships
Not Applicable
28. Negative impacts and Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Are there negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
No
Negative impacts for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable
Mitigating actions for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable
Responsible Officer for Carer's responsibilities
Not Applicable