

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED 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, 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 will be considered by the Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on

This version of the PROD is included in the agenda pack for committee members to review ahead of the meeting.

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:

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Signed

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Date