

From: Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth, Environment and Communities Cabinet Committee – 26 September 2023

Subject: **Petition scheme debate- Folkestone temporary library closure**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Summary: Position statement responding to the petition on Folkestone Library, the petition wording is “We the undersigned petition the council to Fix Folkestone Library and re-open it to the public. This is a Grade II listed building, which is probably the earliest surviving purpose-built library in the County. A library is more than a building: it is a symbol of community and learning. That is why the threat to Grace Hill is a matter of extreme concern for all of us.”

1. Position statement

- 1.1 KCC recognises and appreciates the continued impact of the temporary closure of Folkestone Library for the people of Folkestone and the surrounding area and acknowledge fully the depth of feeling expressed locally.
- 1.2 No longer term decisions have yet been taken and all options remain open, this includes what is required to repair the existing library to enable it to reopen and exploring the potential for an alternative building in the town centre.
- 1.3 We have explored a number of potential routes for funding including approaching National Government and exploring other potential funds to bid through for example Arts Council or Heritage organisations but we have not yet been able to identify a suitable fund to bid for or funding that is available. We will continue to explore external funding opportunities including the potential to secure Community Infrastructure Levy funding from Folkestone and Hythe District Council.
- 1.4 KCC is exploring longer term options for the reopening of a town centre library and intends to update further when there is some certainty on viable options and how it will engage with the Folkestone community on these.
- 1.5 In parallel to this work has progressed to expand our current temporary library service provision;
- 1.6 We are making arrangements to provide some further temporary library services in Folkestone town centre in the Shepway Youth Centre, which is close to the original library building. We will move as much of the Folkestone local history collection as possible here, as well as provide public PCs, microfilm readers, photocopier and a free reservation pickup point. We expect to open this in November.

- 1.7 Additional public computers and additional birth and death registration location in Folkestone at Wood Avenue Library are now all available. We will continue to keep our FAQs on the library page updated with key developments as well as updating our social media and information available at the Folkestone libraries.

Background documents

None