

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

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signed

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date