

This Report will be made public on 14 March 2023



Report Number **C/22/101**

To: CABINET
Date: 22 March 2023
Status: Non key decision
Responsible Officer: Jyotsna Leney
Cabinet Member: Cllr Jennifer Hollingsbee, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities

SUBJECT: FHDC Response to KCC Community Services Public Consultation

SUMMARY: On 17th January 2023 KCC opened a public consultation on the closure of KCC buildings housing Children's Centres and Youth Hubs, Public Health Services for Children and Families, Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities, Community Learning and Skills (Adult Education), and Gateways. The public document on KCC's website shows the county-wide proposals for closures and repurposing of sites. A bespoke Folkestone and Hythe version was sent to the Council with a letter on 10th January 2023. Informal Cabinet requested a member briefing from KCC which was held on 9th February 2023 on how the proposals had been reached and impact on the district. This report sets out some key points relating to this consultation. FHDC's formal response back to KCC on the proposals is due 26th March 2023.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To agree the Council response to the KCC consultation on the proposed closure of building in the district using the online feedback form and covering the points listed in section 3.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To note the report C/22/101.
2. To authorise the Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Lifeline, Area Officers & Street Homeless to submit the Council's consultation response based on the key issues outlined in section 3. of the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 KCC launched their public consultation on Community Services on 17th January 2023. The full public consultation document available on the KCC website (<https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/community-services-consultation>) explains the financial background to the consultation, with the need for KCC to make financial savings in the coming years. The document proposes the closure of a number of buildings (or operations from non KCC owned buildings), with services affected being co-located with other services in various locations. The scope of the review covers:

- Open Access Children's Centres and Youth Hubs
- Public Health as it relates to the Open Access Family Hubs Transformation
- Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities
- Community Learning and Skills (Adult Education)
- Gateways

1.2 A bespoke version of the document sent to the Council on 10th January 2023 (please refer to Appendix 1) contains additional information specific to Folkestone and Hythe District, including demographic data and which wards have the highest levels of deprivation within the district.

1.3 KCC also set up a number of public drop-in events for the Folkestone and Hythe District. Two events were held in Folkestone and representations were made to KCC to hold an additional one on the Romney Marsh, due to the impact of the two children's centre closures in that area. However, KCC made the decision to deliver the drop-in sessions only in Folkestone and not expand any further.

1.4 When the consultation was announced, KCC offered to provide a members briefing session and this took place on 9th February 2023. Headline messages from the KCC briefing were:

- The closures are required due to large costs associated with repairs and ongoing maintenance, the need to address carbon emission reductions.
- The rationalising of services and bringing services into closer alignment to best serve the community.
- The idea of co-locating services in other KCC buildings, including libraries, was presented as well as the need to carry out more outreach in the community.
- There will be a focus in talking services to where residents are in most need.
- There will be reinvestment of resources back to enable service redesign. KCC have stated that around £4million would be reinvested back into services.

2. Folkestone and Hythe Proposals and Key Considerations

2.1 KCC are proposing to close 48 buildings in total across the county, of which five are located within Folkestone & Hythe District. Of the proposed closures within the district, four are Children's Centres or Youth Hubs, and one is a service for adults with learning disabilities:

Ward.	Building.	Potential Outcome.	Nearest alternative.	Distance Miles.
Childrens Centres and Youth Hubs				
4 Folkestone Central.	Five (Shepway Youth Hub).	Moving in to Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre.		1.0
			Caterpillars Children's Centre.	2.1
9 North Downs East.	Hawkinge Childrens Centre.		The Village Children's Centre.	2.7
			Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre.	2.8
			Caterpillars Children's Centre.	3.0
11 Romney Marsh.	Dymchurch Children's Centre.		New Romney Children's Centre.	3.9
13 Walland and Denge Marsh.	Lyddle Stars Childrens Centre.		New Romney Children's Centre.	4.2
Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities				
1 Broadmead.	Folkestone Sports Centre.		Phase II.	14

2.2 KCC has assessed the proposed closures using a set of scoring indicators for each ward:

- Deprivation
- % of the population aged 0-15
- Deprivation Affecting Children
- % of reception age children who are overweight or obese
- % of deliveries to teenage mothers
- % of low birth weight live babies
- % of people over 65 living alone
- Deprivation Affecting Older People
- Long term unemployment
- Ethnic diversity
- % of pupils achieving a pass in English and Maths at GCSE
- % of people who report a long-term illness or disability
- Population growth
- Population density
- Digital exclusion
- Transport connectivity
- Broadband speed

2.3 For every ward in the county, a score of 1 for the lowest 20% and 5 for the top 20% to those adversely impacted by each of the above indicators was given. This gave a total "score" for each ward; allowing KCC to categorise each ward from greatest to lowest overall need. This was used to provide a snapshot of what overall need was likely to be across the whole of the county and enabled KCC to create a first draft of the buildings they would retain and those they would leave.

2.4 Some additional analysis of the closures across Kent is shown in the table below summarising the proposed closures across the county by district. This shows that Folkestone & Hythe District has the joint sixth highest percentage of total closures, and the joint third highest absolute number of closures:

Total Closures (Children’s Centres, Youth Hubs, Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities, and Adult Education)

District	Buildings Remaining	Buildings Closing	Total Buildings	Percentage Closure
Ashford	6	3	9	33%
Canterbury	8	6	14	43%
Dartford	5	7	12	58%
Dover	4	3	7	43%
Folkestone and Hythe	7	5	12	42%
Gravesham	8	1	9	11%
Maidstone	6	4	10	40%
Sevenoaks	4	5	9	55%
Swale	7	5	12	42%
Thanet	8	4	12	33%
Tonbridge and Malling	6	1	7	14%
Tunbridge Wells	3	4	7	57%

(Green indicates lowest percentage closures, red highest).

- 2.5 In total the District would be left with 4 x Family Hubs (formerly Children’s Centres/Youth Hubs), 2 x Centres for Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities and 1x Community Learning and Skills building (Adult Education). In addition 8 Libraries would be retained and it is proposed that some existing services move to these locations.

3. Response to KCC

- 3.1 It is proposed to use the points listed in 3. to form the Council response to KCC. This will be submitted by Officers, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, Lifeline, Area Officers & Street Homeless, via an online form. A copy of the consultation questionnaire is attached as Appendix 2.
- 3.2 Whilst KCC have explained the rationale for closures there are a number of issues which may form part of the consultation response:
- The reduction in the number of children’s centres on the Marsh and the lack of viable alternatives. There are transport and associated cost issues in accessing children’s centres located further from the Marsh, which should be considered as part of the response. KCC should explore all options to link with other public and voluntary groups in the Marsh area which have existing buildings and deliver services (e.g. Romney Marsh Community Hub and Romney Resource Centre.)
 - It would be helpful for KCC to provide more information on scoring for transport connectivity for the Marsh area. Transport is critical for access to the Children’s Centre for very rurally isolated communities.

- Proposals for reinvestment should include the potential to link up with other service providers including voluntary, community and social enterprise groups.
- The number of children accessing free school meals could be another indicator unless included in the wider indicator of deprivation affecting children?
- It would be helpful to understand why a true co-located building has not been considered suitable for this District and that co-location with non KCC services is looked at as an option especially where there are pressures facing KCC elsewhere.
- Critical services need to be safeguarded (e.g. our community hub model) as potential cuts to their wellbeing contracts may impact on local services. They have been critical in supporting families through many issues including the Covid pandemic, Cost of living crisis and Ukraine. A portion of the £4 million repurposed funds should support not just outreach but other essential delivery in the community aligned to existing delivery models.
- In making the financial savings from closing buildings, a proportion of funding should be allocated to supporting the redesign of services which can be delivered by joining with other operators of buildings. For example where the Youth Hub is closing and moving its operations to the Early Years Centre in Folkestone there is opportunity to work alongside the Sports Trust who are based in the building opposite at F51.
- Input to the way the family hub model (see 3.3 below) is to work, aligning with both the LCPG, CSP and CSU will be welcomed including consideration of funding for these to join up with providers as per examples cited above.
- FHDC would welcome the opportunity to be involved in any discussions on where and how alternative service delivery provision could be realised (e.g. opportunity for schools to offer some of the services impacted for example by the closure of children's centres).
- There are some concerns over the security and ongoing condition of any vacant buildings pending sale. This may attract vandalism and anti-social behaviour which would have additional impact on the community and local Council services in dealing with issues.
- FHDC would appreciate early notification that any reductions in service provision from existing levels will be underpinned by work on community reassurance (ongoing communications and media opportunities) to try to maintain community confidence in affected areas.
- FHDC would welcome the opportunity to work alongside KCC to co-design any new outreach models to ensure communities are well supported and to link with joint engagement opportunities etc.

3.3 In November 2021, the Government launched plans for the roll out of a national Family Hubs programme. The Government's vision is to develop the Family Hubs Model Framework across all Local Authorities in the country. The Government has supported this ambition with dedicated funding to transform community-based provision and Kent was identified as one of 75 eligible Local Authorities to apply for this funding. This model will help with the join up of services and potentially the investment in this will make for a more integrated approach in managing key KCC services. KCC should review the use of this funding to assess if it can be used to support the provision of services in line with the consultation.

- 3.4 External stakeholders were contacted to seek their views in order to further inform the Council response - most responded to say that they would be submitting their organisation's own response direct to KCC. A key concern raised by the Community Hubs across the District is that funding for various wellbeing contracts that are paid for by KCC (commissioned by Social Enterprise Kent) would cause adverse impact. Although this is related to possible cuts in the VCS sector and not the closure of the buildings, there are some indirect opportunities from this in terms of collocating services.
- 3.5 Cabinet is asked to consider the key issues outlined above and agree that these form the Council response to the KCC consultation.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 4.1 The key risks are outlined below:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Lost opportunities in joining with other service	High	Medium	To encourage KCC to consider alternative ideas for joining up services
Community support reduced due to cuts in funding to other sectors	High	High	To look at synergies, co-location opportunities and alternative service provision with KCC

5. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

5.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report

5.2 Finance Officer's Comments (RH)

There are no specific financial implications resulting to this report, however it is noted that there may be further work to be undertaken, when a decision is reached, on how any reinvestment funds would be best used across the district.

5.3 Equalities and Diversities comments (GE)

The family hub model and more outreach in the community is welcomed as a way of reaching vulnerable people and wider sectors of the community. However, a reduction in key services e.g. access to children's centres on the Marsh could negatively impacted equal access and support needed for some vulnerable groups.

5.4 Climate Change Implications (AT)

Kent County Council's consultation document (page 30) states that the proposals could save around 500-800 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, representing a 5% reduction in the carbon emissions from the county council's operations (although it is not stated over what period the reduction will be realised). However, the document makes it clear that this reduction relates only to the emissions attributable to Kent County Council's estate and operations, and KCC cannot model what impact the proposed changes will have on the emissions of service users and other organisations. The rationalisation of services into a smaller number of buildings has the potential to increase emissions from transport, if service users and employees have to travel greater distances to access the facilities and cannot do this easily by public transport. There is likely to be a reduction in the emissions from the buildings themselves, if older, less energy efficient county council buildings are disposed of, but this will depend on how the redundant sites are redeveloped. Any proposals for the redevelopment of former KCC sites within Folkestone & Hythe will need to meet policies in the district's Local Plan, building regulations or any updates to these standards that may be introduced by the time planning applications are submitted.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting.

Jyotsna Leney
Health Wellbeing and Partnerships Senior Specialist
Tel: 01303 853460
Email: jyotsna.leney@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix 1: FHDC report on closures compiled by KCC
Appendix 2: KCC Communities Consultation Questionnaire