

58d High Street
Cosham
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RE: 16/01482/FUL 58c High Street, Cosham, Portsmouth, PO6 3AG.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Relate Portsmouth and District is an independent charity (and Company Limited by Guarantee) and a member of the national Relate Federation, working to promote health, respect and justice in couple and family relationships to a future where healthy relationships form the heart of a thriving community.

We have delivered services in the City and surrounding District for over 50 years, helping people of all ages, backgrounds and sexual orientations to improve their relationships and life chances. Our core services include relationship counselling for individuals and couples; family counselling; counselling for children and young people; sex therapy and life skills training.

Face to face services are provided by 15 practitioners working from our Portsmouth Centre, Outpost 'room hire' locations operate in Southsea, Gosport, Fareham, Emsworth, Petersfield & Havant. In addition, adult counselling is provided over the telephone.

As we discussed on the phone we operated out of your city centre council premises since the 1960's, and only left following instruction to vacate this year 31/5/16. It has been an extremely difficult time for the charity, as we attempt to weather the cuts in a climate of austerity and its impact on the available funding. Most recent years have seen significant losses, however we have taken many measures such as drastic restructuring, streamlining processes, and diversifying our service offer, to keep the charity going. Our biggest challenge since the funding cuts has been the June move this year, costing us in the region of [REDACTED]

We are now just coming out of the post-move period with a view to stabilising the charity. We can now offer an improved and increased service due to investing in partitioning off 5 new counselling suites. These suites sit directly over 58c and the proposed plans for a licensed establishment, and consequently we are extremely concerned about the impact for the following reasons;

- Environment - Nearly all of our counselling happens in the evening, when people are out of work and school. Evenings being a time when a bar is most likely to be noisy and disruptive to the local environment. The throng of talking and music, the congregation of people outside smoking, making phone calls or socialising. The staff using the communal areas and dropping large amount of bottles in the bins.

Counselling requires a quiet and calm setting, the environment is crucial to the client's ability to relax and feel safe. Noise and distractions are detrimental to both the client and counsellors ability to focus intently on the developments in the room. We build the room around the need for these environmental factors, using soft lighting, sound proofed walls and soundproofed wall hangings. We also use white noise machines in the lobby area (these are not suitable inside the counselling rooms as trials have shown they are also distracting to the client and counsellor).

- Client Safety - Families and children access the centre services, along with people attending requiring sex therapy. We strongly believe that it is not appropriate for children and young people to have to use a centre where all of the side effects of a drinking establishment (noise in the counselling room, along with anti-social behaviour, smoking, shouting and fights outside) may affect them and their ability to benefit from counselling support, as well as being a less safe venue to come and go from. Some young people attend counselling without their parents, often without the knowledge of their parents depending on the issues they are facing.
- Client Discretion – Many of our clients express that they feel the need for anonymity and discretion when attending counselling. The thought of having a bar with people smoking or congregating in the front of our building may deter people from attending. A known local establishment of this nature may lead clients to feel nervous about attending for fear of being seen.
- Brand - Non funded clients will be paying up to £55 a session and will expect an appropriate environment in discrete premises. Due to the funding cuts we are not in a position to be any more competitive than local private practice offerings. Our brand, the client experience, and the quality of the service we provide is crucial to our being able to sustain a service. People won't come to us if the environment is detrimental to the counselling experience. We are a struggling charity and can't afford to lose any contributions as a result of the impact of this.
- Client Issues – Many clients can present with issues around alcohol abuse – it would be extremely detrimental to a client facing these issues to try and receive counselling above the throng of a busy bar.
- Community - Cosham High Street can face difficulties regarding anti-social behaviour outside in the street. Our opinion that licensed premises will exacerbate the levels of anti-social behaviour. Our services are here to promote and foster healthy relationships and behaviours amongst all the adult, children and young people we work with in our local community. We feel that a licensed establishment will be detrimental to that, and risk our ability to continue to operate from those premises. However in saying that, the prospect of another move and the ensuing financial impact would most likely render the charity insolvent.

Please advise if you need more detail from our clinical supervisors regarding the impact this poses to the clinical practise. I would be happy to meet with any of your representatives to discuss any of these points further.

Kate Glasby
Centre Manager on behalf of the Board of Trustees
Relate Portsmouth and District