

High View Oast Stakeholder Meeting

Tuesday, 21 March 2024, 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

MS Teams Meeting

Agencies and Services in Attendees
KCC, UAS Children's Service
KCC, Deputy Chief Executives Department
KCC, Councillor
KCC, Prevent
KCC, Public Health
Kent Police
Dover District Council

Kent County Council (KCC) – Dover District Council (DDC) – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS Children)

Welcome and Introductions
Introductions were made and an overview of the agenda was provided (circulated with invites). It was stated that there will opportunity throughout for questions to be asked and also an item at the end dedicated to stakeholder questions.
Legal Context
<p>A KCC representative stated that, in July 2023, a High Court Ruling was issued, which made it clear that KCC must take every possible step to increase capacity across the county to look after and accommodate all UAS children arriving in Kent. KCC must comply with the ruling, using all legal means to establish provision to do so. The existing Reception Centres in Kent are not enough to provide sufficient accommodation.</p> <p>Referral to KCC for arrivals of UAS children will escalate as the weather improves throughout the year, and so KCC must work at pace to bring new accommodation into operation. KCC's statutory responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 to care for UAS children are clear – however, it has been recognised that this cannot fall to Kent alone and requires a national response including, sufficient funding from central government and an effective National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The High Court ruling stated that KCC and the Home Office must work together to ensure that KCC has the resources required to meet its statutory responsibilities. The Reception Centres and services for UAS children are funded directly by central government and not KCC or Kent taxpayers.</p>
Building Works
<p>High View Oast in Ash was previously an elderly persons residential home. Following purchase, KCC's contractor has begun work at the site. A KCC representative highlighted the different sections of the building, including staff and communal areas. Windows will be fitted with restrictors and CCTV will be installed to cover the external areas of the building. Security, as well as KCC staff, will be on site 24/7.</p> <p>A KCC representative assured colleagues in the meeting that the building will be signed off by Building Control. The Centre will have 22 beds, with ensuite bathrooms, allowing for isolation requirements if needed (e.g. suspected communicable disease).</p> <p>The works programme is on schedule and due to finish at the end of August. Once handed over to the service, they will have approx. 2 weeks to mobilise before it becomes fully operational. In response to a question raised about the timeline, it was explained that the contractor is working hard to complete works as early as possible but currently the programme is still set to finish late-August, with the service expected to have access to the centre from the last couple of weeks of August. A KCC representative noted that the timeline for being operational is also aligned to extensive recruitment activity, including getting key staff in place to progress with Ofsted registration (as a Children's Home).</p> <p>In response to a query regarding demographic of UAS children due to be placed at High View Oast, it was</p>

confirmed that the typical demographic of UAS children is 15-17-year-old males – however, High View Oast, as a Children’s Home, will be for children under 16 years of age. There are far fewer arrivals of female UAS children and so they will likely be placed in foster care. It was confirmed that staff at the Centre will be KCC staff.

Management of The Centre

A KCC representative explained that High View Oast will be registered with Ofsted as a Children’s Home and will need to meet the regulatory standards for Children’s Homes and be subject to regular inspections. Children will be accommodated on a temporary basis, pending transfer on the National Transfer Scheme. The mandated timeframe for NTS transfers is 10 working days – however, some transfers take less days and some take longer. There is an ongoing legal process, which includes the NTS. KCC remains committed to moving children swiftly and safely to their more permanent homes across the UK.

UAS Children are children in care of KCC and have an allocated Social Worker who leads on their plan for care, as well as an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to ensure the plan is satisfactorily completed. Social Workers will visit children at the centre.

A representative from DDC queried if there is sufficient Social Worker resource. A KCC representative explained that, since January 2024, KCC has undertaken a large-scale recruitment campaign. This has been met with a positive response and interviews and onboarding processes are underway to ensure that staff levels are in place.

Staff and managers at the Centre will ensure that children’s basic needs are met and will deliver a robust programme of activities and education. As they are only in Kent for a short period of time, they are not enrolled in schools and their education is delivered on-site. This is largely based around English language and UK law and society, with the focus being on supporting them to recovery from their journey to the UK and begin the process of resettling.

A KCC Public Health representative noted the work undertaken in development of trauma-informed activities, e.g. arts and crafts – it was confirmed by a KCC representative that this is part of the programme and that children’s feedback to staff indicates that there are a range of activities that support their early recovery.

There is a small outdoor recreation area at High View Oast but staff will also take children off-site for activities such as bowling, swimming, etc. In response to queries raised regarding children being off-site, it was confirmed that staff would take children to a range of off-site activities, giving them the opportunity to experience things they may not have previously, with a focus on enriching their lives. It was also confirmed that UAS children, like all children, have the right to access services and amenities in the local community. Therefore, there will be times when children are allowed off-site, unsupervised,, with the agreement of staff about where they will be and when they will return. This could be at different times of the day and will depend on the child’s age and individual circumstances.

If a child does not return at a time agreed, at any time of day, staff will take all possible steps to locate them. If a child does not return at the time agreed, and staff have taken all possible steps to locate them, then there will be increasing concern for their safety and well-being, requiring contact with Police. KCC works closely with Kent Police at its existing reception centres, where protocols have worked well for many years and will be in place at all reception centres.

A Kent Police representative requested a copy of the protocols in place at the current centres and confirmed they would be shared with the local community officer. A KCC representative confirmed that there is good engagement with Police at the existing centres and, moving forward, these Stakeholder meetings will become more frequent and focused on operational activity, chaired by the Registered Children’s Home Manager and linking with local Police and stakeholders. A KCC Councillor representative confirmed they had shared the letter to residents and information with the local community officer.

A KCC Public Health representative queried if a link has been established with the local GP surgery. A KCC representative confirmed that the service is working closely with NHS Kent and Medway on facilitating the registration of all children to their local GP surgery. Children will be registered with local GPs so they can access primary health care in the event they require this during their short stay at the reception centre. KCC staff use good professional judgement regarding children’s health needs e.g. accessing over the counter medication / pharmacy

advice before GP consultation where possible.

A KCC Public Health representative noted that it will be important for Public Health to be linked into the building phase to ensure that requirements within the Infection Prevention Control document are incorporated – certain things can only be addressed during the building phase.

A KCC representative noted the comments made by a KCC Public Health representative around recruitment of new staff and awareness/recommendations for vaccinations, etc – this will be picked up outside of the Stakeholder Meeting.

A DDC representative queried what engagement has taken place to date with the Parish Council. A KCC Councillor representative advised that they met with the Parish Council to share information with them about the use of High View Oast as a Reception Centre for UAS children and answered questions raised. A Parish Councillor had been invited to the Stakeholder Group, however, it was ascertained later than they could not attend due to a conflicting meeting. Consideration will be given to how KCC engages directly with the Parish Council and other stakeholders, e.g. schools, who were not able to attend today. One of the schools has indicated that there is potential for their facilities to be used for UAS children. A KCC representative noted the rural location of High View Oast, which is similar to an existing centre and stated that a rural location does mean that community engagement and accessing activities in the community needs will be different to those in a more urban location.

In terms of other community engagement, a KCC representative explained that a letter was sent to residents within a particular radius of the centres. This was also shared with District Councillors, the MP, and Chief Executive for DDC. In this letter, KCC apologised for not sharing details of the plans for High View Oast sooner and not being able to consult with residents in the normal way that KCC would prefer to do but explained that this is due to the on-going legal proceedings.

A central mailbox has been set up, alongside a webpage for Frequently Asked Questions (which is being updated now), to address the main questions and concerns. The meeting is the first Stakeholder Meeting for High View Oast and will take place quarterly until the site is operational, at which point the membership will change and the frequency will increase.

A Kent Police representative explained that they hold a meeting with all Parish Councils in Dover and asked how information regarding these plans can form part of this (subject to it being raised, and with Ash Parish Council present). A KCC Councillor representative stated that they would attend this meeting, if available and requested details.

A KCC representative stated that there had been concerns raised by residents and in other Stakeholder Meetings around KCC not knowing anything about UAS children. They explained that, before any child is placed in a Reception Centre (or other type of placement), they are met by Social Workers at Dover, who then undertakes an assessment of their needs and risks. This assessment informs the plans put in place to care for that child. Social Workers and staff at the Reception Centres are very aware of the risks of exploitation to UAS children and are trained in working with vulnerable children to keep them and the community safe.

Stakeholder Questions

A KCC Councillor representative confirmed that there were no comments or concerns raised in meetings they have attended that have been different to those covered in the meeting. Concerns raised around safety have been both in reference to safety of the community and safety of the UAS children themselves.

A couple of residents raised concerns about potential traffic during unsociable hours – a DDC representative queried if children and professionals would be attending the centre during late night hours. A KCC representative explained that children can arrive at any time but there is not an expectation traffic will be heavy during any particular hours.

A KCC representative confirmed that, following Stakeholder Meetings, a further letter would be sent to residents, which would provide a summary of any updates and the discussions from the Stakeholder Meeting. A copy of this letter would be shared with members of the Stakeholder Meeting, along with a record of the meeting.

Agreed Actions

Ref.	Action
HVO-001	KCC to provide the Kent Police representative with a copy of the UAS Missing Children protocols in place at current centres.
HVO-002	Kent Police presentative to provide details of the Dover Parish Councils meeting to the KCC Councillor representative.