



18th July 2024

Dear Resident,

Re: Edward Moore House

Following our letter on 5 April 2024 we would like to provide you with an update and further information and reassurance about Edward Moore House and its proposed use for UAS children.

Communication

It is regrettable KCC was not able to share plans in full for Edward Moore House ahead of time. The necessity to comply with the urgency of the High Court ruling and accommodate all UAS children who continue to arrive to Kent, means it has not been possible for KCC to consult with residents in ways it might normally and would prefer to do.

KCC carefully considers requests for public meetings regarding the reception centres as we understand communities have questions and we want to keep you updated as much as we can. The council has a responsibility to ensure the safety of those attending meetings and the wider public. Unfortunately, KCC experience shows public meetings relating to asylum seeker accommodation draws in activists and groups from outside communities, who seek to disrupt or cause harm including the distribution of filmed footage and targeting of individuals in attendance. KCC believes it is right to continue its approach of meeting with local councillors and community leaders to hear resident feedback from those they represent and share information, so the centres work well with and alongside their local communities.

On 1 May 2024 Kent County Council (KCC) held its first meeting with your local councillors where your questions regarding Edward Moore House were represented and responded to.

Senior officers for the relevant service areas in KCC, KCC Councillors for Gravesham, Gravesham Councillors, and senior representatives from: KCC Prevent, Kent Police, NHS England, Gravesham Borough Council, Siri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara and Holy Trinity Primary School, attended the meeting.

This meeting provided opportunity for discussion regarding the legal context under which KCC is working, the enabling works on site and the management of the centre once in operation. It provided opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions on behalf of the residents and services they represent. Minutes of the meeting are available at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/protecting-children/reception-centres-for-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children/resident-communication> and communication between KCC and stakeholders continues.

We receive enquiries from residents and continue to respond to these as quickly and fully as possible. These enquiries and responses are informing our Frequently Asked Questions webpage: www.kent.gov.uk/receptioncentres, which you can access for information. KCC is working to make this information as accessible as possible for residents.

We would like to encourage residents to continue to use our enquiries mailbox (reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk) to make any further contact about Edward Moore House.

Key points

- UAS children are extremely appreciative of the accommodation and support they receive from KCC and are eager to learn about, integrate and contribute positively to UK society.
- KCC's experience of running existing reception centres for many years demonstrates UAS children present extremely minimal risk to local communities.
- All reception centres must register with Ofsted, either as a home for children aged under 16, or as supported accommodation for children aged 16 and 17. KCC must ensure it has the right balance of children's homes and supported accommodation to accommodate all UAS children arriving to Kent.
- When we wrote to you on 5 April, our intention was to register Edward Moore House as a home for children aged under 16. However, we now must register Edward Moore House as supported accommodation for children aged 16 and 17. This is because the sale of another property was withdrawn from KCC and replacement sites are more suitable as children's homes which are being progressed in order to ensure there is adequate accommodation for all children that may arrive in Kent.
- Edward Moore House will be a temporary home for children aged under 18. Both Home Office and KCC have robust and established protocols for safeguarding children. Whilst KCC's experience of running its two current reception centres shows this to be rare, if concerns are raised regarding a child's age, then experienced social workers complete an age assessment as a priority. If the age assessment concludes the child is over 18 years old, they are moved immediately to Home Office accommodation and support for adults.
- Edward Moore House will have dedicated KCC staff and security staff 24 hours a day, throughout the year, and there will be no time when the children are unsupervised at the home. KCC staff and interpreters will fully orientate each child with the local area so they understand and respect local laws and religions.
- UAS children in the care of KCC are not in detention, they have the same rights to the same level of care as any other looked after child, including access to services and amenities in the local community. Children will be able to independently leave Edward Moore House for short periods of time, with the agreement of staff about where they will be and when they will return.
- Skilled and experienced social workers meet with newly arrived children to assess their needs and risks, including trafficking and exploitation. These assessments inform plans made around children before they move to a centre. Social workers and staff at the reception centres are trained and experienced in working with vulnerable children and are responsible for implementing plans to keep children safe at the centre and in the local community.
- Edward Moore House will be a temporary home for children, whilst they await transfer to the care of other local authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The required timescale for this, set by Central Government, is ten working days.
- Children will not enrol in local schools. Instead, KCC staff will deliver education and activity at the home and supervised activity in the community. One of our existing reception centres is located in close proximity to a school and works well as an integrated part of community infrastructure. There are no issues with the location being close to a school. As the centre becomes operational, we will be working closely with the school and other stakeholders to ensure this is the case at Edward Moore.

- Whilst UAS children present extremely minimal risk to local communities, we are working with KCC Adult Social Care so information and reassurance is provided to vulnerable residents who are concerned about Edward Moore House being a temporary home for UAS children.
- 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 Edward Moore House. KCC works successfully with Kent and Medway NHS to support registration with local GPs at existing reception centres and KCC's experience of running existing reception centres has shown the majority of UAS children do not frequently require GP consultations. KCC staff use good professional judgement when responding to children's health needs e.g. accessing over the counter medication / pharmacy advice before GP consultation where possible.
- We are aware there are suggestions there are more suitable locations and a number of hotels have been referenced. KCC did look at all available opportunities when considering the location, however, in order to ensure KCC is able to bring forward accommodation at the soonest opportunity as set out in the court ruling it was important the council focused on properties already with the correct planning designation and a layout compatible for this use. This meant properties such as hotels were not a viable option.
- Works at the site are expected to complete in August 2024 with the centre becoming operational in September 2024. We understand any works are disruptive and we will do our best to minimise any disruption as far as possible.
- We would like to apologise for any disruption caused by security dogs on site. The level of security is based on a regular assessment of risk and the use of dogs at the site is reduced outside of working hours which we hope should reduce noise from the site, however, should risk increase the security arrangements and the use of dogs will need to be reviewed.

We hope this information provides you with further reassurance regarding Edward Moore House.

We will continue to keep you updated and will write to you again when we have more information to share with you.

In the meantime, if you do have questions, please contact us at reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk.

Kind regards,

UASC Reception Centre Enquiries Team