

Cypress House, Stakeholder Meeting

15th October, 11am

MS Teams Meeting

Agencies and Services in Attendees
KCC, UAS Children’s Service
KCC, Deputy Chief Executives Department
KCC, Councillor
MP – Gravesham
KCC, Prevent
Kent Police
Head of Community Support, GBC
GBC, Councillor
GBC, Councillor
GBC, Councillor
Kent Equality Cohesion Council
Representative for the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara
Holy Trinity Primary School
Chief Executive Department (public health)

Kent County Council (KCC) – Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS Children)

Welcome and Introductions
Introductions made and agenda shared with attendees.
Overview
<p>This is the third stakeholder meeting, following the previous meetings in April and May. The meeting will provide an update on the planning and operations of the centre, focusing on sharing legislation and regulations and how the independent living program aligns with these.</p> <p>A representative for the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara suggested including a representative from the Mosque. The KCC representative mentioned they are already reaching out to the Mosque and hope a representative will join the next meeting.</p>

A KCC representative reported no further complaints or concerns since July, with the focus now on onboarding and recruiting staff. Most permanent staff started two weeks ago and have been participating in an intensive induction program, including shadowing in other centres and online training modules. A few local residents have been employed, and further advertisements for centre workers will be posted soon. A KCC representative explained that employing local residents will hopefully encourage integration into the local community.

Building works

A KCC representative provided an update on the ongoing building works. Contractors are on site, but there is a delay in the delivery of 120 fire doors. Despite this, the completion date remains in November, and efforts are being made to mitigate the delay.

There was an incident where surrounding neighbours were asked about their telephone lines. Initially, they all responded that they did not have a telephone line. However, after the line was cut, one resident reported having a telephone line. The telephone line is expected to be reinstated this week.

A GBC councillor inquired about the expected date for the first intake of young people. A KCC representative responded that there is no clear date yet, but members will be updated as soon as possible. The handover is scheduled for November, with intake expected 2-3 weeks afterward.

A KCC representative advised stakeholder tours will proceed when suitable, providing an opportunity to see the building and how it will operate.

A KCC representative explained that the intake of young people will occur 2-3 weeks after the handover. This delay allows staff to become familiar with their surroundings and feel confident in their roles. Once the centre is open, the intake will be gradual, starting with a small number of young people to minimize disruption to the community. Measures will be in place to avoid traffic congestion around school opening and closing times. A KCC representative assured that this will be a smooth and low-key process.

A representative of the Kent Equality Cohesion Council responded that a gradual approach is sensible and that the meetings are very helpful. They agree that a slow approach is the correct one, as it has proven effective in other recently opened centres. This method will help residents accept the opening of the centre and prevent any division within the community. It is important for everyone to work together when the centre opens.

A KCC representative added that the two centres that have recently opened have successfully used this approach. It is crucial to work closely with local schools and the community, and the stakeholder meetings play a key role in fostering communication and addressing any concerns.

Legislation and Regulation

Following the high court ruling, the opening of centres has been very fast paced. The centres fall under the supported accommodation regulations, which outline the quality standards that Ofsted expect to see supported accommodation providers achieve.

A KCC representative advised that there are processes in place to ensure the safety of the children and maintain the accommodation to a high standard in accordance with these regulations. Each centre adheres to a set of principles:

The key principles are:

- I feel safe and secure where I live and in my wider environment.
- My voice is respected, heard and advocated for, so I can influence the support I receive.
- I have confidence that the adults who support me understand me, are skilled and work effectively together to best meet my needs.
- I have my own space that I feel proud of and live in a comfortable, well maintained, and stable accommodation.
- I receive high-quality, tailored support that sustains my health and wellbeing.
- I have strong, trusting, and meaningful relationships within my support system and can rely on the adults around me.
- I feel supported to learn and apply skills for independent adult living.
- I feel positive about my future and opportunities as a result of the support I receive.

A KCC representative explained that the staff and support offered to the young people fulfil these principles. A priority of the centre is to make the young people feel safe and allow them to build trusting relationships with staff and peers.

A MP – Gravesham referred to an earlier point about the importance of the young people feeling safe and heard as the centre opens. However, there are concerns that residents in the community haven't been listened to. What has been the response to the residents' concerns?

A KCC representative responded that residents have been directed to the Q&A page on KCC's website. Additionally, stakeholder meetings are held so that representatives can bring forward any concerns they have heard from the community. Any inquiries sent via email are responded to, and letters have been sent to the residents.

Independent Living Programme

A KCC representative advised the independent living programme is a key component in supporting young people on their resettlement journey in the UK. It helps them develop their understanding and confidence in spoken and written English and begin integrating into communities.

A KCC representative explained that the programme helps young people develop the necessary independent living skills for when they move into independent accommodation. All lessons are planned across weekdays, keeping the young people busy and occupied.

A KCC representative advised that there are key modules in the independent living programme, one of which is education. There has been a significant recruitment drive to onboard higher-level teaching assistants to deliver the education programme. Based on the ESOL programme, it aims to develop their English communication and written skills. These sessions are delivered within the reception centre.

The programme is complemented by workshops conducted by centre staff on budgeting, cleaning and hygiene, local community and safety (policing, UK law), cooking, food shopping, and developing independent skills.

There is a focus on resettlement, as often children arrive with their body clocks out of sync. The staff help the young people to realign their body clocks by developing a routine.

The centre offers several activities for the young people, including playing board games with peers or going out into the community to play cricket games.

A KCC representative concluded that the aim of the independent living programme is to help integrate young people into society and make them feel settled in their new environment. The staff work to reduce the young people's anxieties about moving, as they often do not know when or where they will be relocated. Since the NTS is not a Kent-led scheme, the centres are sometimes informed of moves on the same day. The staff are trained to manage these expectations and prepare the young people for their move.

A KCC representative explained that the stakeholder members and their contacts within the community offer a good opportunity to help deliver the independent living programme. KCC representative advised they have already started to reach out to local schools and others in the community.

A KCC representative explained that a good example is the recent meeting at the Gurdwara where there was a discussion around the relationship between the Gurdwara and the centre. A KCC representative explained that each young person has an orientation when they arrive at the centre, and this will start to include information around the Gurdwara and explain the rules and expectations around this.

Representative for the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara explained they'd be happy to provide slides and presentations for the orientation programme and help deliver this at the beginning, which can be continued by the staff.

A representative of the Kent Equality Cohesion Council suggested that it would be beneficial to create a wider presentation about Gravesham and its history of migration, building upon the mosque and the importance of the town's heritage.

A KCC representative responded that this would be a positive piece of work, and the centre will continue to reach out to implement this. It is a good example of how the centre can partner with members of the community.

A representative for the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara mentioned that an interfaith walk is being organised soon, which a representative from the Mosque will be able to discuss further in the next meeting.

A KCC representative advised that local police join the community meetings in other centres, which helps break down myths that the young people may have about those in authority. The community meetings are on a weekly basis, and there is an opportunity for partners and members of the community to join.

A KCC representative expressed the possibility of helping local businesses by offering the opportunity to provide supplies for the centres. For example, another centre has a local fruit supplier who provides fresh fruit. A KCC representative explained links with local businesses is encouraged.

A KCC representative mentioned that the independent living programme runs all day, keeping the young people engaged and alleviating concerns about them wandering around the local community.

Stakeholder Questions

A KCC representative asked if there were any questions or any other business.

A representative for the Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara referred to an earlier point about connections with the residents in the area. They mentioned that some residents might feel they have not been consulted and have to drive past Cypress House daily. It would be beneficial to engage with the local residents, and the Gurdwara could serve as a good venue for a community meeting. They advised that there shouldn't be a reliance solely on the stakeholder meetings.

A KCC representative responded that, at this stage, they are unable to hold community meetings but will provide feedback following the meeting. All inquiries are addressed as they arise.

A MP – Gravesham suggested arranging drop-in sessions for concerned residents. This would help alleviate concerns about the centre's opening.

A KCC representative acknowledged these points and agreed to take them forward outside of the meeting.

A representative of the Kent Equality Cohesion Council agreed with the previous points about engaging with residents. They noted that once residents observe the ongoing work after the site opens, it will help alleviate tensions, much like the experiences during the development of the Gurdwara and the Mosque. They believe that residents wouldn't want to see the centre fail, as this would have a negative impact, so positive engagement is crucial.

A KCC representative assured that these points are taken on board and will be discussed outside of the meeting. The KCC's position on these points will be shared, and stakeholder meetings will be held more regularly once the centre is open.

A MP - Gravesham clarified that conversations with residents need to occur before the centre opens to reduce concerns. Drop-in sessions at the Gurdwara could be an effective way to achieve this.

A KCC representative explained that they will move forward with these points. The next stakeholder meeting will be organised as soon as possible, along with a stakeholder tour of the building.

AOB

A representative of KCC Prevent wanted to bring attention to an incident in Canterbury where a young person was killed. The offenders' names were released to the public, and immigration enforcement partners advised that there is a possibility of tension online. Although no tension has been observed online so far, the Prevent Team will continue to monitor the situation and work directly with the police. There is also a risk of misinformation being spread. Representative of KCC Prevent asked to be notified if anyone becomes aware of online tension.