

## Maple Rise Stakeholder Meeting

Tuesday, 15 July 2025, 10:00 am – 11:00 am

### MS Teams Meeting

Service/Agency
KCC, UAS Children's Service
KCC, Councillor
Kent Police
K+M NHS

Kent County Council (KCC) – Ashford Borough Council (ABC) – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS Children)

#### Recap Since Opening July 2024

Maple Rise opened on 16 September 2024 following successful Ofsted Registration. Since opening, Maple Rise has had monthly Regulation 44 meetings with an independent visitor, who reviews the home and reports back to Ofsted. All Reg 44 visits have been positive, with a few recommendations which have been actions – in the last two Reg 44 visits, there were no recommendations. Maple Rise received its first full Ofsted Inspection in March 2025 (report is published), which was very positive and received a judgement of Good in all areas with no recommendations – the inspector commented that some areas were Outstanding.

Since opening, 122 children have been accommodated at the home and then transferred out to other LA placements across the UK, via the NTS. Current, as of the date of this meeting, Maple Rise has 8 children. The NTS is operating quickly, with one child moving tomorrow who only arrived over the weekend.

Since opening, there have been no incidents of concern. A couple of children had gone missing but returned on their own accord – these were minor incidents where children had been feeling anxious or frustrated about when they would be moving to a more permanent placement. There have been no significant incidents.

Since the Ofsted Inspection, Maple Rise has been focusing on developing independent skills, particularly for children to have time in the community on their own, without Support Workers. This has been going well – when children first arrive, Support Workers help them to understand the local area, the routes back to Maple Rise, who to contact, etc – since this work started, there have been no concerns and no children have gone missing.

Kent Police have visited Maple Rise to do some direct work with children, which the children really enjoyed (sitting in a police vehicle, trying on uniform, etc). This has been positive work to build trusting relationships between children and the Police. Kent Police have not attended Maple Rise for concerns of ASB or the behaviour of children.

There was one incident of an intruder on site (not believed to have entered the site as a threat to UAS children or staff). Separately, there have been 2 incidents of individuals reporting to the home, claiming to be uncles of children – home and Social Work staff responded to these appropriately and swiftly to ensure the safeguarding of children.

Since opening, Maple Rise has received 2 complaints: one in relation to deliveries mistakenly going to neighbouring houses (resolved); and one in relation to a single occasion of a member of staff using their car horn for staff to open the gate for them (also resolved). Both complaints were addressed in a timely way. It was reported that a local neighbour had spoken (in person) to a member of the on-site Social Work team in relation to security shining their torch in the direction of neighbouring homes – this was addressed with the security team – however, the resident did not leave their contact information, so no formal response was able to be shared with them but there have been no further reports of these issues occurring.

Maple Rise has clear policies and procedures in place should any protesting groups or individuals seeking to cause disturbance or threat to the home present at Maple Rise.

Maple Rise is continuing its focus and development of the Inclusion and Support Programme (ISP) for children, which has a strong emphasis on ESOL as part of their on-site education. Children learn the basis of English and numbers and these lessons are reinforced by activities in the community, e.g. using their maths skills to buy cooking ingredients from the local shops.

Maple Rise has developed good relationships with GP surgeries, who are working well with the home to registered children and accommodate appointments when needed – appointments are mainly in relation to immunisations.

Children at Maple Rise have engaged in a number of activities, including litter picking and bird watching at the local nature reserve, which the boys have enjoyed. Boys have had the opportunity to attend and participate in a number of local events, including Christmas events in the town centre. Maple Rise are keen to continue working with partners to identify more events and activities for children to be involved in, including volunteer opportunities to help contribute to the local community.

Currently, Maple Rise is fully staffed with no vacancies and all staff are those living in the local community or elsewhere in Ashford. Maple Rise is keen to continue to be a local employer where they have vacancies arise.

### Local Events

A KCC representative welcomed attendees of the meeting to put forward suggestions of any local events or activities that children at Maple Rise could access.

A Kent Police representative suggested linking in with the Police Cadet programmes – work is being done to establish an integrated system for what is being provided to children and young people in Ashford.

A KCC representative noted the 3 core purposes of the Stakeholder Meetings (as per the Terms of Reference) are:

1. Sharing information related to the operation of the Reception Centre and/or activities within the local community.
2. Establishing a robust local network that support the aims of the Reception Centre – through providing positive engagement, learning and enrichment opportunities for UAS children; and, in turn, offering the opportunity for UAS children and the Reception Centre to contribute positively to the local community. These discussions contribute to the development of the Independent Living Programme (ILP).
3. Raising questions/concerns/complaints from residents or other interested persons, with the intention to be solution-focused within this space.

The KCC representative felt that all three areas are still relevant to the purpose of the meetings, but that the Reception Centres (including The Limes) needed to re-focus the meetings on the second point.

In response to a Kent Police representative, a KCC representative confirmed that there is current 8 children staying at Maple Rise, all of whom are referred onto the NTS and awaiting transfer. The NTS mandated timeframe is 10 working days. However, this is currently operating swiftly with some children moving within 2-6 days.

The Kent Police representative mentioned historical issues of conflict between older boy due to religious beliefs; boys getting involved in drug-related activity; and children going missing. A KCC acknowledged the vulnerability of UAS children to become involved in criminal activity and stated that KCC's experience overall is that, as a group of children, those levels are very low and not seen in Maple Rise or our other Reception Centres. The KCC representative recognised the positive timeframes that the NTS is operating under – this progress has been linked to where KCC and partners are seeing a significant reduction in the number of children going missing, as the NTS is operating in a timescale where children can be reassured and informed about when and where they will be moving to.

A KCC Councillor representative raised concerns regarding the frequency of visits from Kent Police to Maple Rise, given the short turnaround of children staying at Maple Rise before moving elsewhere in the UK – they commented on concerns regarding the effective use of Police time and resources.

A KCC representative clarified that Kent Police had own visited occasionally to undertake direct work with children at Maple Rise – the last visit was a month ago. A Kent Police representative commented that Kent Police’s Child-Centred Policing Team will engage with all community groups – and stated Maple Rise is part of the Ashford community and there is an opportunity to engage with them to embed messaged about how policing in the UK works. They acknowledged that it would not be possible to reach every child at Maple Rise, so the team would work with staff at the home to help them to delivery key messages also.

A KCC representative agreed with Kent Police colleagues around their continued engagement and support to Maple Rise, which may include providing materials to support staff at the home to deliver the key message to children. For UAS children who have arrived into the UK and are accommodated within Kent for a short period of time before transferring to other areas of the UK, there is an opportunity to support their understanding of UK law, what is safe and acceptable, trusted relationships with authority etc and this is benefitted by working alongside Kent Police in a number of ways.

A KCC Councillor representative commented that, from the last published minutes in April 2025, there is mention of a visit to the Big Cat Sanctuary and questioned if this is proportionate as an activity for UAS children to attend. A KCC representative explained that this was a single visit that was suggested by a Councillor who attended that meeting and was open to the whole service, not just Maple Rise children.

Another KCC representative agreed to review the details of this specific visit and would share the details with the KCC Councillor representative but commented that the service works hard to ensure there is a structure programme of learning opportunities and recreational activities for children – and this also has significant impact to reduce the numbers of children going missing. The service works closed with Ofsted and partners to understand their feedback around what KCC offers to UAS children as Children in Care to the LA, in line with statutory duties and requirements as registered provision with Ofsted.

A Kent and Medway NHS representative agreed with KCC representatives and commented that partners and Stakeholders should be reminded that UAS children are children – irrespective of how they arrived in the UK and stated that it is important the KCC and its partners support them to settle, to give them an understanding of life in the UK. This should involve a range of opportunities to see and experience our culture and, whilst it is important to be mindful of spending, there are numerous benefits to outings such as the one mentioned, including mental wellbeing support.

A KCC representative agreed and noted that the majority of activities that children within the UAS Children’s Services are involved in are things like football; accessing local nature/green spaces, such as local parks; leisure centres, etc – which are proportionate to do for any children. There may be a few occasions throughout the course of a year for bigger events and outings, which are appropriate and consistent with what is offered for all Looked After Children.

#### **AOB**

None raised.