

Aspen Lodge Stakeholder Meeting
Friday, 11 July 2025, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
MS Teams Meeting

Service/Agency
KCC, UAS Children's Service
KCC, Deputy Chief Executives Department
Kent Police
Sholden Parish Council

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

Welcome and Introductions
A KCC representative welcomed attendees to the meeting and confirmed that minutes of the meeting would be shared and, once agreed, published on kent.gov.uk .
Overview
<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>Children will be accommodated on a temporary basis, pending transfer on the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The mandated timeframe for NTS transfers is 10 working days. Last year, the average time for transfers to take place was 7 working days – and so far this year, it has been closer to 6 working days.</p> <p>Aspen Lodge – and all other Reception Centres – will be funded by Central Government, not by KCC taxpayers or from KCC reserves. Aspen Lodge is one of 10 centres across Kent, 7 of which are currently open, registered with Ofsted and operating well in their communities. A 10th centre has recently been acquired near Lydd and is set to open Spring 2026.</p> <p>Stakeholder Meetings for Aspen Lodge have been held quarterly, chaired by the Assistant Director. The next meeting will be held in September, chaired by the Service Manager. After, the meetings will move to monthly, chaired by the Registered Manager, and the focus of the meetings will become more operational.</p> <p>Children's Homes must have a Registered Manager, who is responsible for the day to day running of the home. A Responsible Individual must also be registered to the home – for Aspen Lodge (and all other Children's Homes for UAS children in Kent), this is the Service Manager.</p> <p>Letters were sent to residents in July 2024. A second letter was sent in March 2025. A final letter is being prepared to be sent to residents in July 2024 – this will remind residents of the use of Aspen Lodge and provide the key messages and information for how to raise enquiries, etc.</p> <p>KCC continues to operate a centralised mailbox and Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) site to allow enquiries from members of the public to be answered in a timely way. The FAQ site also has a link to a page for published letters and minutes of Stakeholder Meetings. Once Aspen Lodge has opened, residents and partners can contact them directly via email, telephone or by visiting the centre and asking to speak to staff.</p>
Building Works
A KCC representation shared a presentation, outlining the works to date, which includes: decorated bedrooms; new boiler installation; patio work; external painting. Any windows overlooking the school/neighbouring residents will be frosted to ensure privacy on both sides, while still allowing natural light to come in.

As advised in previous meetings, a KCC representative stated that, ahead of the centre fully opening for children to arrive, stakeholders will be invited to tour Aspen Lodge. Invites will be issued in due course.

A Sholden Parish Council representative noted that there are significant road closures in and around London Road – this includes a 6-week closure of London Road (started 23 July 2025).

A KCC representative confirmed that stakeholders will be informed via email when the first children go into Aspen Lodge. Aspen Lodge will have a phased opening – whilst there is a maximum capacity for 18 children, this will incrementally increase over time, depending on arrivals.

Management of The Centre

Reception Centres are temporary homes for children whilst they wait to be transferred to permanent placements in other local authorities via the NTS. Reception Centres are not immigration processing centres. Immigration processing is undertaken by the Home Office prior to coming into KCC's care. KCC is not involved in processing or approving asylum claims.

Aspen Lodge will be registered with Ofsted to provide temporary accommodation for a maximum of 18 children under 16 years of age. KCC's existing 2 Children's Homes have received very positive Ofsted inspections with Good gradings. Aspen Lodge is being developed with the same facilities, structure and approach as the other Children's Homes and KCC is confident Aspen Lodge will equally be as good.

Staff at Aspen Lodge will be starting with KCC in the coming weeks, to receive their training and induction programme, ready to deliver good practice when Aspen Lodge opens. Aspen Lodge has a mixture of existing KCC staff and new employees – all are keen to start.

KCC is keen to offer benefits to the local community through establishing Aspen Lodge as a Reception Centre, through being a local employer, and to support the integration of Aspen Lodge into the community. Recruitment is progressing well. However, a number of vacancies remain and will be advertised shortly. A KCC representative encouraged Stakeholders to share adverts for jobs at Aspen Lodge with the community.

Stakeholder Questions

Prior to the letter dated 3 March 2025, KCC received a total of 15 enquiries. The themes of these enquiries included: lack of consultation prior to purchase; disagreement with money being used for UAS children generally; concerns about UAS children in the community (risk of anti-social behaviour); distribution of letters and proximity to the local Primary School; proximity to busy road (safety concerns).

Since the letter dated 3 March 2025, KCC received a further 9 enquiries regarding: staff parking concerns, particularly concerning Vicarage Lane; contact from the Parish Council (who have since been added into the membership); and repairs to the single-track road; offers of donations; and volunteering opportunities.

For the final letter to be sent to residents in July 2025, Stakeholders will receive a copy of the letter on the day of delivery. The content of the letter will not vary too much from previous letters but remind people of the key messages and contacts. In previous centres, we have not seen an increase in enquiries or concerns at the point they open – the communication strategy to inform residents ahead of opening helps to ensure a soft landing in this regard.

A Kent Police representative commented that the building looks good and will be a positive space for children – and that the home is needed, valuable and fully supported by Kent Police. They stated that Kent Police is committed to ensuring the centre has what they need, including being visible and present at the centre to undertake direct work with children, which can help to break down some of the barriers and develop positive and trusting relationships with the children. The Kent Police representative stated that no negative reports have come forward to them in relation to Aspen Lodge. A KCC representative thanked Kent Police for their comments and continued commitment to working jointly with KCC.