

## Edward Moore Stakeholder Meeting

Wednesday, 1 May 2024, 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm

### MS Teams Meeting

Agencies and Services in Attendees
KCC, UAS Children's Service
KCC, Deputy Chief Executives Department
KCC, Councillor
KCC, Prevent
Kent and Medway NHS
Kent Police
Gravesham Borough Council (GBC)
GBC, Councillor
Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara
Holy Trinity Primary School

Kent County Council (KCC) - 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>A KCC representative explained that Edward Moore had been identified as a suitable site for UAS Children as the internal spaces and layout of the building are appropriate for providing homely accommodation for children and is also located in an area similar to existing centres that have operated for many years.</p> <p>The necessity to comply with the court ruling and provide accommodation for UAS children at pace has meant that it has not been possible to consult with residents in the way KCC would prefer to do. The on-going legal discussions between KCC and central government also means there is limited information that can be shared. Letters were sent to residents in the immediately neighbouring areas and a webpage with FAQs is also available, which letters are published on.</p> <p>A GBC Councillor representative advised that they did not receive a copy of the letter. A KCC representative agreed to review this outside of the meeting as it was believed a copy was sent to each Councillor for the ward.</p> <p>GBC Councillor representatives commented on the diversity within the local community and urged KCC to consider engaging with community organisations, including the Gurdwara, local school and Mosque, as well as many others, to develop relationships with the community to provide support and activities for UAS children. KCC representatives agreed that they would engage with community organisations to take this forward.</p> <p>A Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara representative asked if KCC would be able to meet with residents to answer questions and concerns, as they had been contacted by residents asking for this – the Gurdwara would be able to host such a meeting. GBC Councillors also were supportive of a meeting being held, though noted that there were concerns raised by KCC in another meeting around advice from Kent Police about holding public meetings. KCC</p>

representatives and Prevent representatives explained that, unfortunately, the strong advice given by Kent Police is that no public meetings should take place due to the safety and security concerns that these pose – these risks have been experienced in other similar meetings regarding Manston and Napier.

A KCC Councillor representative also noted that any meeting would need to provide representation from all areas of the community and queried whether, given the advice around public meetings, if the membership of the Stakeholder Group could be expanded. A KCC representative explained that this is the first Stakeholder Meeting for Edward Moore, and when the site becomes operational, the membership of these meetings will change, and the frequency will increase. The chair would become the Registered Manager and operational staff will attend, with invitees covering local organisations and partner representatives. This will be a useful forum to explore the offer from local providers in the community.

A KCC representative also advised that they are liaising with the Kent Equality Cohesion Council to explore the opportunities to engage with all parts of the community. At this early stage, the Stakeholder Group members are key in sharing the messages within the community.

A GBC Councillor representative asked if anyone had visited the local area, to understand first-hand the area that UAS children placed at Edward Moore will be in. They felt that this would be important and offered to show KCC officers round. A KCC representative accepted this offer.

### **Building Works**

A KCC representative provided an overview of the Edward Moore building, noting the areas intended for bedrooms and communal areas (dining), and staff areas. An area at the back of the site is to be used for deliveries, etc. Edward Moore benefits from a garden area for recreation activities. CCTV is in place around the building. The works programme is on schedule, due to finish at the end of September. Increased security has been put in place across all Reception Centre sites (\*it was clarified that this was increased following vandalism of a car near to another centre – the increased security is an officer and security dog). Edward Moore provides 36 beds total.

A GBC Councillor representative queried what from the existing facilities were remaining and how they would be used, e.g. rooms with kitchenettes, offices, etc. A KCC representative explained that new plans have been drawn up and that the existing facilities have been taken down to enable the new plans to be implemented. This includes main kitchen and officers for staff, as well as communal areas for visiting, etc. The previous owner had removed the catering equipment. The refurbishments are to ensure that Edward Moore feels homely and is appropriate as a home for children.

It was requested that clarity be given around the age of children intended to be accommodated at Edward Moore, as it had been stated at a meeting held yesterday that this would be for 16–17-year-olds. A KCC representative explained that, if registered as a Children’s Home with Ofsted for children aged under 16, it is possible for 16/17-year-olds to also be placed at the same site, if required. The site will only accommodate children, i.e. under 18-year-olds. The Centre will operate in accordance with Ofsted regulatory standards required for the ages of children accommodated at the centre. A KCC representative apologised for any confusion regarding the ages of children at Edward Moore.

It was queried if Edward Moore would only accommodate males or if girls would also be placed there. A KCC representative stated the majority of UAS children are male. However, there are small numbers of female UAS children and they are usually placed in foster care or, for those 16/17 years old, through independent providers of supported accommodation. However, if there were larger numbers of female arrivals, KCC would need to consider options within its accommodation – any changes in this regard would be communicated with stakeholders.

In response to a GBC Councillor representative, it was confirmed that each child would have their own bedroom (i.e. single occupancy) and that staff working at the centre overnight a waking-staff, so would not have bedrooms – they would stay awake throughout the night.

Holy Trinity School representatives offered to provide support to UAS children in terms of experiences or facilities. School representatives queried the increased threat levels that had been mentioned earlier, which were clarified as noted above\*, but it was further explained that KCC is working closely with Prevent and Kent Police and there is no expected heightened level of safety concerns for the community. A Prevent representative provided some context

for the role of Prevent in Kent and Medway and stated that they are happy to support the school in addressing any concerns.

A Kent Police representative confirmed that they have been working closely with KCC to manage the risk to UAS children, given their significant vulnerabilities and stated that there is no threat from UAS children to the community. Whilst there are concerns where potential protests may occur, these concerns are low. An offer was made for a Kent Police representative to reach out to the school to support with any concerns.

A KCC representative confirmed that UAS children would not be enrolled into schools and would be educated on-site. This is due to the short period of time that they will be in Kent, as they will transfer to another Local Authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Recruitment to roles within the service is being done through KCC's main recruitment system. Teaching Assistants, employed by KCC and overseen by Virtual School Kent, will provide education on-site.

In response to a GBC Councillor representative, it was stated that, before a child is placed in Edward Moore (or any other Reception Centre), they would be met by Immigration Officers (Home Office) at point of arrival and then KCC Social Workers, who will undertake an assessment of their risk/needs. If a child has a disability, Social Workers will consider which placement is most appropriate for them – this could be at a Reception Centre or foster care placement. This would be considered as part of the assessment when they arrive.

Concerns were raised regarding how children are age assessed. A KCC representative explained that UAS children may arrive without documentation for their age. The Home Office robustly considers the claimed age and their presentation. If the Home Office determine their age to be 18+, they will not refer them to KCC. If there is an age claim issue, a robust process is followed whereby Social Workers undertake a full age assessment and, if determined to be 18 or over, would be immediately removed from KCC accommodation and referred to the Home Office. Any concerns regarding age are acted upon swiftly.

A GBC Councillor representative queried the opening date of Edward Moore (noting if it potentially overlaps with start of new term or half-term break for the local schools) – it was confirmed that the works are due to end 21 September 2024, for the site to then become operational.

In response to GBC Councillor representatives, it was confirmed that siblings are placed together and would also remain together for their onward placement under the NTS. If a sibling is 18+ years, they cannot be accommodated in the Reception Centre and would be accommodated as an adult by the Home Office. However, KCC officers work with the Home Office to ensure that communication is maintained and for the child's NTS transfer to be to the Local Authority area where their sibling has moved to.

A GBC Councillor representative and Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara representative noted there are many activities, such as the Saturday morning Punjabi School for children aged 5-11 years. A Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara representative also noted that there are rules and protocols in the Sikh community which should be explained to UAS children so that, as they engage with the community, potential conflicts are minimised – for example, no smoking or drinking alcohol. A KCC representative stated that they would be happy to take forward the opportunity to work together with local community groups and organisations and recognised the importance of helping UAS children understand the community. In terms of any incidents of smoking and drinking, this would equally be of concern to KCC and, if occurred, would be addressed with the individuals to ensure this does not happen..

### **Management of The Centre**

As with all Reception Centres, Edward Moore will have dedicated KCC care staff and security staff on site, at all times, 365 days a year. The on-site security staff are there to ensure the security of the centre but are not part of the staff supporting or caring for children. Edward Moore will be Ofsted registered, operate in accordance with the regulatory standards and be subject to inspections by Ofsted. As managers are appointed to Edward Moore, it is intended that they would be introduced to the Stakeholder Group and these meetings would then evolve into a more operational forum, as described earlier.

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.

Staff and managers at the Centre will ensure that children's basic needs are met and will deliver a structured programme of activities and education. As the children 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 as well as an Independent Living programme to support their understanding of 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.

The education programme is supplemented by activities such as arts, music, sports, etc and this is where the links with the community and local organisations is important. UAS children have expressed that, when they first arrive, they want to focus on the present, then the future, and then the past once they are more secure and settled. Therefore, KCC focuses on delivering a structure programme of activities so that they are occupied and stimulated through a variety of activities – there will come a time later, once they have settled into a longer-term placement, when they can work through their trauma.

The mandated timeframe for NTS transfers is 10 working days – however, some transfers take less days and some take longer. There is an on-going legal process, which includes the NTS. KCC remains committed to moving children swiftly and safely to their more permanent homes across the UK. Staff work with the children to prepare them for the transition to their new placements.

The existing centres have been running successfully for years now and, being mindful of the vulnerabilities of newly arriving UAS children, KCC will be looking to replicate existing protocols and programmes at the new centres.

A GBC Councillor representative stated that it is positive to hear of the plans for UAS children to be supported and accommodated at Edward Moore and expressed hope that this means that they will not be subject to the types of practice that occurred some 25 years ago where UAS children were not well accommodated or supported. A KCC representative assured members of the Stakeholder Group that UAS children would be supported and robustly supervised whilst on-site and during planned off-site activities.

Like all children, UAS 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 and with risk assessments in place to ensure this is appropriate and safely managed.

A Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara representative queried how KCC supports translation for non-English speaking children and whether it is possible to consider a child's country of origin when deciding where to place, so that, potentially Edward Moore could 'specialise' in accommodating children from the Indian sub-continent, which the local community would more easily be able to support.

A KCC representative recognised the importance of community and religion for many UAS children and that being surrounded by things that are familiar to them is of great benefit. KCC makes every effort to place children in the accommodation most suited to their needs. However, in terms of being able to utilise a particular site specifically for particular nationalities would be challenging as arrivals are so unpredictable. In terms of translation, KCC uses interpreters who can support children in-person, or in short-notice via telephone, as well as having materials translated into the main languages spoken by UAS children. Where some children may be illiterate, there are pictorial-based materials and translated videos. KCC is currently working on developing the materials and translation support for children. The most common countries of origin for UAS children are Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Albania, Eritrea, Syria and Vietnam.

### **Stakeholder Questions**

The majority of stakeholder questions were raised throughout the meeting. It was queried whether a public meeting held online would be able to take place, noting the concerns about in-person meetings. However, KCC representatives stated that, where similar public meetings have taken place online before, there have been instances of specific officers being targeted with abuse and threats made against them and their families, resulting in police intervention. Therefore, online public meetings are also advised against. A Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara representative requested if there was any communication that can be shared to answer this request from residents.

GBC Councillor representatives thanked KCC officers and partners for answering their questions at the meeting and encouraged KCC to continue to engage and communicate with the community. A KCC representative assured stakeholders that it is KCC's intention to ensure that communication and engagement with the community is maintained and apologised for the initial communication having not been ideal following the high-court ruling. Following this stakeholder meeting, an update letter will be sent to residents in due course.

### Agreed Actions

Ref.	Action
<b>EM-001</b>	Kent Police representatives to reach out to Holy Trinity Primary School to engage with them specifically around any concerns they have.
<b>EM-002</b>	KCC representatives to contact Councillors regarding a visit to the local area.
<b>EM-003</b>	KCC representatives to provide communication regarding the position around not holding public meetings.