

Connors House Stakeholder Meeting
Thursday, 10 July 2025, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
MS Teams Meeting

Service/Agency
KCC, UAS Children's Service
KCC, Deputy Chief Executives Department
CCC, Councillor
Kent Police

Kent County Council (KCC) – Canterbury City Council (CCC) – 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>Connors House – and all other Reception Centres – will be funded by Central Government, not by KCC taxpayers or from KCC reserves. Connors House 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 Connors House 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 Operational Manager, and the focus of the meetings will become more operational.</p> <p>Letters were sent to residents in July 2024. A second letter was sent in October 2024, and a third 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 Connors House 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 Connors House has opened, residents and partners can contact them directly via email, telephone or by visiting the centre and asking to speak to staff.</p> <p>A CCC Councillor representative noted that in the previous minutes they had asked a question regarding part of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 which meant people who arrive via small boat do not have access to the process to become a citizen. They were due to receive a response to this outside of the meeting but had not received one. A KCC representative apologised and confirmed UAS children who arrive in the UK by small boat or other vehicle are able to claim asylum. UAS children at Connors House and other Reception Centres will have an active asylum claim, which the Home Office will make decisions on.</p>

Building Works

A KCC representation shared a presentation, outlining the works to date, which includes: drainage works; roof repairs; removal of scaffolding; replaced fencing; removal of tree; installation of commercial kitchen and domestic kitchen (latter for children to use to learn cooking skills); patio works; window installations (with restrictors); and installation of new boilers. Fire door works have been started. Furniture deliveries are expected from 7 July onwards.

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 Connors House. Invites will be issued in due course.

A KCC representative confirmed that stakeholders will be informed via email when the first children go into Connors House. Typically, centres have a couple of weeks to mobilise their staff and services (catering, cleaning, etc) before the first children are placed.

A KCC representative stated that the design and standards for Connors House mirror the high quality provided in other Reception Centres, which has received positive feedback from Ofsted, children and staff.

A Kent Police representative commented that the building looks good and asked if the local members of the Child-Centre Policing Team and local Beat Officer would be able to attend the tour and begin to build their relationship with the centre. A KCC representative confirmed they would be welcome to join and meet the team.

A Kent Police representative queried how many children would be at Connors House. A KCC representative stated that Connors House is able to accommodate a maximum of 44 children, age 16-17-years-old, at any one time. KCC expects to use Connors House throughout the year. However, occupancy rates will vary with winter months being quieter in terms of arrivals and busier periods expected throughout spring and summer. Therefore, the local community will see Connors House being busier during the spring/summer months.

A KCC representative noted that it is important that KCC has the right balance of Supported Accommodation and Children's Home provision to ensure that it can accommodate all UAS children who arrive to Kent. Connors House will be registered with Ofsted to provide supported accommodation for a maximum of 44 children aged 16-17 years. As an Ofsted-registered accommodation, Connors House will be held to the same high standards as all supported accommodation across the UK.

A Kent Police representative queried if other centres have seen a rise in children going missing or ASB in the local area. 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 our Reception Centres. A Kent Police representative commented that the centres have been well-embedded in other areas with no impact on Kent Police seen – and stated that the centres offer very good care to children.

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. UAS Children are grateful for the support they receive and KCC offers a structure programme so that there are not times where they have 'nothing to do'.

A CCC Councillor representative asked why gas boilers were installed and not a more renewable energy solution. A KCC representative explained that this was not viable for Connors House, due to the additional works that would have been required to ensure an alternative to gas boilers would function safely and efficiently.

Solar panel installation would have required planning permission and was deemed not viable due to the timeframes as well as the implications this would have on the construction of the roof. A KCC representative stated that all aspects of spend relating to the Reception Centres must be accounted for and approved with the Home Office.

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

Connors House will be registered with Ofsted to provide temporary accommodation for a maximum of 44 children aged 16-17 years. As an Ofsted-registered accommodation, Connors House will be held to the same high standards as all supported accommodation across the UK. KCC's existing 2 Children's Homes have received very positive Ofsted inspections with Good gradings. Connors House is being developed with the same facilities, structure and approach as those sites and KCC is confident Connors House will equally be as good.

Staff at Connors House will be starting with KCC in the coming weeks, to receive their training and induction programme, ready to deliver good practice when Connors House opens. Connors House 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 Connors House as a Reception Centre, through being a local employer, and to support the integration of Connors House into the community. Recruitment is progressing well. However, some vacancies remain and will be advertised shortly. A KCC representative encouraged Stakeholders to share adverts for jobs at Connors House with the community.

Stakeholder Questions

Prior to the letter dated 24 February 2025, KCC received a total of 3 enquiries. The themes of these enquiries included: removal of an oak tree; volunteer opportunities; and queries raised by a guardian at Connors House at the time.

Following the further letter to residents dated 24 February 2025, only 2 additional contacts were received regarding. One enquiry was a request for the footpath at Connors House to be jet-washed post-works and the second was positive feedback from a local resident about the use of Connors House to support UAS children.

As stated earlier, KCC will be preparing for a final letter to residents to provide some of the key messages, including update on building works schedule, and contact details for enquiries. This will be shared with Stakeholders.

A Kent Police representative noted there was an incident of 'auditors' filming the site – it is understood no comments or further engagement had resulted from this footage. A KCC representative noted that the individuals filming were not engaged by anyone on site – similarly, procedures will be in place for staff when the site becomes operational to manage these incidents in the same way.

A KCC representative commented on the support received from the Stakeholder Group and community today and looks forward to continuing to work with them at Connors House becomes operational.

CCC Councillor representatives thanked KCC colleagues for the work they have completed in a short space of time and for keeping them informed.