

Oak Manor Stakeholder Meeting

Wednesday, 16 July 2025, 9:30 am – 10:30 am

MS Teams Meeting

Service/Agency
KCC, UAS Children's Service
Virtual School Kent
Kent Police
Kent Kindness

Kent County Council (KCC) – Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS Children)

Welcome and Introductions
Introductions made at start of meeting.
Overview of the Centre
<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. Oak Manor is one of 7 currently operational centres: 5 of which are Supported Accommodation for 16–17-year-olds; and 2 are Children's Homes for under 16s – two further centres will be opening in the summer.</p> <p>Oak Manor has been open as a Reception Centre for UAS children since 2016, with a capacity to accommodate up to 34 children. Oak Manor is registered as Supported Accommodation with Ofsted and therefore meets Ofsted regulations and requirements and is subject to inspections.</p> <p>Oak Manor operates collaboratively with partners including KCC Prevent Team, Kent Police and volunteers, working together to create a nurturing environment and encouraging integration in the UK.</p> <p>Children arriving in the UK don't automatically move into Oak Manor or any other centre. Children first go to Dover for immigration purposes. KCC Social Workers meet with children at Dover and undertake an assessment of their needs and risks. This assessment informs the plans put in place to care for that child, including matching them to appropriate accommodation provision – for example, it may be that a child is assessed to be very vulnerable, and it may be that a foster placement is more appropriate for them. Social Workers and staff at Oak Manor are very aware of the risks of exploitation to UAS children and are trained in working with vulnerable children to keep them and the community safe.</p> <p>UAS children are Looked After Children to KCC and have the same rights as other children. Plans are put in place, informed by assessment of risk and need, to ensure they have the right support.</p> <p>Oak Manor has dedicated KCC staff on site 24/7, 365 days a year. Oak Manor has a mixture of long-standing staff with years of experience, and newer staff. New staff are given a full induction and training programme. In addition to the Reception Centre staff, Oak Manor is supported by a Higher Learning Teaching Assistant who leads on the educational lessons to children; Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Security teams are also present 24/7, all through the year – security are present to protect against unauthorised access to the centre, not because of the children themselves</p> <p>Whilst the female UAS children are referred to KCC, this makes up a very small proportion of overall UAS children referrals. Therefore, Oak Manor does not accommodate girls – usually, girls are placed in alternative provision.</p> <p>Staff at Oak Manor understand that children have been separated from their family and are aware of the</p>

experiences they may have encountered before reaching the UK. Staff are trained in understanding and navigating trauma and provide a nurturing environment.

Oak Manor provides temporary accommodation, pending transfer on the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The mandated timeframe for NTS transfers is 10 working days – however, some transfers take less days and some take longer. Sometimes, children have family in the UK and additional work is needed for reunification. Whilst children are not at Oak Manor for long, during their time in Kent they learn skills to live safely and independently, learning things like money budgeting, community awareness, emergency services, UK law and cultural values, keeping personal spaces clean, personal hygiene and cooking skills. They are supported to navigate public transport, libraries, GP appointments. These skills and developments help them to support themselves as they move onto their next placement and continue their resettlement.

Oak Manor works with a number of external organisations, many of whom join the centre's Community Meetings which are supported by interpreters. For example, Kent Fire and Safety may visit to talk to boys about fire dangers and staying safe; or the Sexual Health Nurse may visit to talk to them about safe relationships, etc.

The centre also works with partners through outreach programmes for activities such as art, music and sports – many boys enjoy football and cricket. Education ambassadors work with Oak Manor to highlight the importance of learning English for their onward qualifications and to secure job opportunities to support themselves in the future.

Oak Manor has not experienced any negativity from the community, who have been largely supportive. The centre continues to be keen to identify further opportunities for boys to engage in local community events.

A KCC representative noted that Oak Manor has been running for a number of years and explained that the opportunities and purpose 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.

A Kent Police representative commented that no negativity has been picked up in relation to Oak Manor – most in the community are unaware of it and those that are aware of it have not displayed negativity towards the centre – and stated that the centre has been successful in being a positive contribution to the community.

They noted the on-going commitment between KCC and Kent Police to work together when children go missing. A KCC representative acknowledged the vulnerability of UAS children to go missing and 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 representative noted that Oak Manor has been able to operate quietly and efficiently for a number of years and made small in-roads with community groups. However, these can be developed further to bring forward new opportunities for boys and for the centre to contribute to the local community. A KCC representative encouraged members of the Stakeholder Meeting to contact the team if other colleagues and partners would like to join and to share ideas of community events and opportunities for boys to get involved in local activities.

A KCC representative noted that the County Councillor was invited and had intended to join today's meeting but, unfortunately, needed to send apologies due to another commitment. A Kent Police representative suggested bringing in representation from the Town/Parish Council.

A Virtual School Kent (VSK) representative noted the positive impact of KCC's UAS children's service on boys' onward resettlement and life achievements – at a recent trip to Epping Forest with other Virtual Schools around the UK, two boys who were both previously at Memon Lodge were there and spoke of the fond memories they had. There is evidence that the programme delivered at the Reception Centres is helping UAS children get a good start in their education – with many going straight into college.

A Kent Kindness representative (charity organisation) representative provided a brief overview of the education offer they provide to children at Oak Manor and Memon Lodge in Ashford: volunteers work with the HLTA and deliver lessons focus on learning core English skills, maths and other core skills.

A KCC representative stated that Oak Manor is a nice place to work, where young people appreciate the support they receive and feel welcomed and safe.

A Kent Police representative stated that they had invited the local Community Liaison Officer to attend this meeting, but she was unavailable. A KCC representative agreed to connect with them outside of the meeting.