

15 March 2024

Dear Resident,

Re: The Limes

Following our letters on 22nd December 2023 and 19th January 2024, we would like to provide you with a further update regarding The Limes.

Communication

We have received a number of enquiries from residents and continue to respond to these as quickly and fully as possible. These enquires are informing our Frequently Asked Questions webpage: <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/protecting-children/reception-centres-for-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children> and we would like to encourage residents to continue to use the enquiries mailbox (reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk) to make contact about The Limes.

Kent County Council (KCC) held two meetings with your local councillors so your questions regarding The Limes are represented and responded to.

The first meeting was held on 9 February 2024 and involved the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC), Deputy Leader of KCC, KCC Councillor for Dartford East, MP for Dartford, Leader of Dartford Borough Council (DBC), District Councillors for Brent Ward and relevant officers from Kent County Council.

The meeting provided an opportunity for political representatives to discuss the necessity under which The Limes will be used as a reception centre for unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children following the High Court ruling in July. There was also discussion regarding the feedback provided by residents through their local representatives. Whilst the legal and funding discussions between KCC and Central Government meant there was limited information KCC could share, it was agreed there was still valuable learning to take from the feedback provided by residents on how KCC communicated with the community.

The second meeting was held on 22 February 2024 and involved senior officers for the relevant service areas in KCC, the Leader of Dartford Borough Council (DBC), District Councillors for Brent Ward and senior representatives from: Dartford Primary Academy, KCC Prevent, Kent Police, NHS England, KCC Public Health; and DBC Housing and Public Protection.

This meeting provided further opportunities for discussion regarding the legal context under which KCC is working and for information to be shared about the enabling works on site and the management of the centre once in operation. It provided opportunity for stakeholders to ask questions on behalf of the residents and services they represent.

Summary of the key points discussed during the meeting on 22 February:

- KCC representatives confirmed that no work undertaken to date is in breach of the existing covenant. KCC is working with NHS Property services to amend the covenant at The Limes for the intended purpose for accommodation for UAS children.
- KCC representatives provided a schedule of enabling works taking place at The Limes over the coming months. It was agreed to share this schedule with residents and is provided below.

- KCC representatives affirmed the centre will have dedicated KCC staff and security staff 24 hours a day, throughout the year and there would be no time when the children would be unsupervised at the centre. There will be a structured program of activity for the children, both at centre and within the community. This program will include English language lessons and guidance on English law and society, thereby supporting the children to develop early skills to socialise whilst having the best and earliest opportunity to contribute towards their community, wherever that may be in the UK.
- KCC representatives affirmed The Limes will be a temporary home for children, whilst they await transfer to the care of other local authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and the required timescale for this, set by Central Government, is 10 working days. This means children will not be enrolled in local schools and education and activity will be delivered mostly at the centre, with some supervised activity taking place in the community.
- Kent Police and KCC representatives confirmed they are working together to ensure the centre is safe for children and the community. From experience of working with KCC's existing reception centres Kent Police do not expect to see any increase in crime by UAS children within the community. UAS children are extremely grateful for the accommodation and support they receive from KCC and are eager to learn about, integrate and contribute to UK society.
- All representatives understood the children at the centre will be Children in Care to KCC and had the same legal right to access the community as any other child. KCC acknowledged the concerns raised by residents about this and affirmed that if children left the centre independently it would be with agreement of the staff about where they will be and when they will return. This could be at different times of day, but children are asked to return by early evening.
- All representatives recognised the particular vulnerability of UAS children and the shared responsibility to protect and support all children. Kent Police and KCC representatives affirmed there will be robust protocols in place, similar to those already successfully used at existing reception centres, to ensure children and the community are safe.

Schedule of Enabling Works

February 2024

- Complete internal reconfiguration works.
- Start mechanical and electrical installation.

March 2024

- Adjustments to internal drainage.
- Continue mechanical and electrical installation.
- Start remedial works to roof – replacing roof covering due to not being fit for purpose/damaged.
- Servicing windows and doors, replacing doors and windows that are faulty or broken.

April 2024

- Continue mechanical and electrical installation.
- Ongoing roof works.
- Ongoing works to windows and doors.
- Works to ceilings internally.

May 2024

- Complete roof works.
- Continue mechanical and electrical installation.
- Continue internal works to ceilings and plastering.
- Commence paintwork throughout.
- Installation of internal doors and balustrading.
- Installation of new water main within site and Openreach cabling.

June 2024

- Commence external tidying works including renewal of existing fences.
- Commence finishing to mechanical and electrical installation.
- Installation of floor finishes.
- Installation of bathrooms.

July 2024

- Complete decorations.
- Installation of kitchen.
- Installation of loose furniture within building.
- Continue external tidying work.

August 2024

- Testing and commissioning.
- Complete internal works.
- Clean throughout.
- Installation of new fencing.
- Removal of site welfare.
- Removal of site hoarding.

We hope this information provides you with further reassurance regarding The Limes.

We will continue to keep you updated and will write to you again when we have more information to share with you.

In the meantime, if you do have questions, please contact us at reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk.

Kind regards,

UASC Reception Centre Enquiries Team