

19th January 2024

Dear Resident,

Re: The Limes

Following our initial letter on 22nd December 2023, we are writing to give you further information regarding The Limes.

At the request of residents this letter is being shared more widely in the local community than the first. If you did not receive the initial letter on the 22nd December, we would like to apologise for not being able to share KCC's plans for The Limes before now. On-going legal and funding discussions between KCC and Central Government means there is limited information to be shared but we will keep you updated as much as we are able.

In July, the High Court ruled Kent County Council (KCC) must take "every possible step" to increase its capacity to accommodate and look after all unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) children arriving in the county. The legal process is ongoing, as are the funding discussions with Central Government.

KCC must comply with the Court ruling. As a result, KCC must identify suitable premises to accommodate and support UAS children at pace.

The Limes is selected as one of the properties suitable to temporarily accommodate UAS children for the following reasons:

- Internal spaces are already configured in a layout to provide homely and appropriate accommodation for children.
- It is located in an area where children can temporarily reside to develop early skills in acclimatising to community norms and socialising.
- The layout and location is similar to KCC's existing Reception Centres which for many years successfully provided temporary accommodation for UAS children before they move to other Local Authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

Reception Centre Management

We understand there are some concerns The Limes might be used to accommodate adults. The Limes will be a temporary home solely for children aged under 18 years old.

We understand there is concern children accommodated at The Limes might be adults stating they are children. UAS children may arrive to the UK without documentary evidence for their age. The Home Office robustly considers any differences between a child's claimed age and their presentation and the information they provide. If the Home Office considers a person to be older than 18 years old, they will not refer them to KCC. Accommodation and support for adult asylum seekers is provided by the Home Office. If concerns regarding a child's age are raised whilst they are in KCC's care, an age assessment is completed by

social workers. If the assessment concludes the child is aged over 18 years old, they are immediately moved to Home Office accommodation and support for adults.

The Limes will have KCC staff and a security on site 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Limes will be registered with Ofsted, operate to its regulatory standards and be subject to regular inspections.

The Limes will be managed in the same way as KCC's two existing reception centres, one of which is based in a similar residential area to The Limes, close to local schools and community services. These centres are operating well and have been for many years, providing temporary homes for UAS children while they await transfer to other local authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The UAS children are continuing to provide strong contributions to their local community which are valued. The required timescale for a UAS child to transfer from KCC care to another local authority under the NTS is 10 working days.

UAS children accommodated at The Limes will be Children in Care to KCC, which means each child will have an allocated social worker, who will regularly visit them and lead a plan for their care. Each child will have an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to ensure this plan is satisfactorily completed. Therefore, social workers will be at The Limes alongside dedicated management staff and security.

KCC dedicated managers and staff at The Limes will be responsible for meeting the children's basic care needs, providing a structured program of weekly education and activities and setting rewards and sanctions for behaviour. As the children will only be at the centre for a short period of time their education will be delivered on-site. This includes 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. This helps UAS children successfully integrate, whilst temporarily at The Limes and when they move to their more permanent home in other local authority areas. The Limes has an outdoor recreation area, which the children will use and KCC staff will accompany them on organised activities off site. There will be times when the children can independently leave the centre for short periods of time, for example, to go to a local shop or park. It will only be allowed with the agreement of staff about where they will be and when they will return. Children will be asked to return by early evening. If a child does not return and cannot be located by 10:00pm, KCC staff will report them missing to Kent Police. This will instigate a multi-agency response to locate them.

Generally, 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. KCC staff are committed to support them in this. For several years, where there are established Reception Centres, KCC has not experienced disturbances in the local area caused by UAS children. We do not anticipate any disturbances to the local area caused by UAS children and will continue to listen to residents and address any concerns. We hope you will support us in promoting the UAS children's safety, wellbeing and sense of belonging within the community when the site opens later this year.

Building works

Building works are expected to be taking place on site until September 2024. The works will involve the refurbishment of the building for this use.

We continue to work closely with our contractors to ensure we minimise noise and disruption to the local residents. For example, deliveries will be taking place outside of school drop off and pick up periods to prevent unnecessary congestion.

We would like to apologise for any inconvenience the temporary parking restrictions outside the site will cause. The restrictions are necessary to provide a clear line of site for our delivery drivers and to protect vehicles which are parked on the street. We are limiting the timings and extent of the restrictions to minimise disruption. We will be removing them as soon as possible upon completion of the works.

Questions

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

We will 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 send these to reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk. Your questions will be individually reviewed and as we anticipate there will be many and similar questions we will organise these into a unified response.

KCC is also working with your local councillors to identify a forum through which they and other local leaders can represent your questions regarding The Limes.