

Acacia Court Stakeholder Meeting
Monday, 29 August 2024, 10:00 am – 11:30 am
MS Teams Meeting

Agencies and Services in Attendees
KCC, UAS Children’s Service
KCC, Deputy Chief Executives Department
KCC, Councillor
KCC, Prevent
KCC, Public Health
Kent Police
MCET, Kent Police
Kent and Medway NHS
Swale Borough Council
Faversham Town Council

Kent County Council (KCC) – Swale Borough Council (SBC) – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UAS Children)

Welcome and Introductions
Introductions made and agenda shared with attendees.
Overview
<p>As a recap for new and existing members of the Stakeholder Group, a KCC representative stated that, in July 2023, the High Court ruled that KCC must take "every possible step" to increase its capacity to accommodate and look after all UAS children arriving in the county. Existing accommodation was not sufficient due to the high numbers of expected arrivals.</p> <p>Numbers of arrivals are influenced by the weather in terms of small boats crossing the channel, but some children also arrive via lorry. The purpose of Reception Centres is to receive UAS children and for staff to help them plan and move onto their next Local Authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The mandatory timescale for a UAS child to transfer from KCC’s care to another UK local authority under the NTS is 10 working days – some children will move sooner, and some may take longer than the 10 working days.</p> <p>Acacia Court is a Reception Centre based in Faversham and falls under the regulations set out around Supported Accommodation Regulations 2023. Acacia Court is listed with the regulators Ofsted and operating legally – we will have regular inspections and audits against the principles/standards and practice.</p> <p>There are a number of key principles for Supported Accommodation – these are that children and young people...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ feel safe and secure where they live and in their wider environment. ○ voices are respected, heard and advocated for, so they can influence the support they receive. ○ have confidence that the adults who support them understand them, are skilled and work effectively together to best meet their needs. ○ have their own space that they feel proud of and live in a comfortable, well maintained, and stable accommodation. ○ receive high-quality, tailored support that sustains their health and wellbeing. ○ have strong, trusting, and meaningful relationships within their support system and can rely on the adults around them. ○ feel supported to learn and apply skills for independent adult living. ○ feel positive about their future and opportunities as a result of the support they receive. <p>These principles are what the Reception Centres focus on and each Centre has a suite of documents that set out</p>

how the service achieves these. This includes a Statement of Purpose and Safeguarding through Positive Behaviour Management.

Since the last meeting of the Acacia Court Stakeholder Group, the building was handed over from the contractors to the UAS Children's Service. A Stakeholder Tour took place on 12 July 2024. From w.b. 15 July 2024, Acacia Court begun to accept children into care. Working with local schools and other stakeholders, Acacia Court has operated with a low profile, to be as sensitive as possible to the community and avoid unnecessary disruption, e.g. avoiding school drop off/pick up times for children leaving/arriving. To date, the Reception Centre is operating well and without incident.

A KCC representative noted the period of national unrest, resulting in increased threats of riots in Kent. Prior to this, a security considerations assessment and a location assessment were undertaken and shared with Kent Police and Prevent colleagues. Lockdown procedures have been tested with staff and floor plans have been shared with Kent Police. Security was increased during this period, to 4 security operatives on site. Whilst there were reports of a peaceful protest planned at Acacia Court, none have occurred.

The service was contacted by a neighbouring resident regarding the lighting in the centre, which has been resolved by the Operations Manager directly with the resident. There are no on-going or outstanding issues.

Building Update

A KCC representative advised that, in relation to the neighbour who queried the lighting at the centre, further blinds have been ordered to be installed into windows and doors to ensure privacy on both sides.

Extra CCTV has been installed where it was identified that an area of the building was not fully covered.

Independent Living Programme (ILP)

A KCC representative explained that the Independent Living Programme (ILP) is a key component to supporting young people's resettlement and transition to their future Local Authority. It helps young people develop their understanding and confidence in spoken and written English and how to begin integrating into communities. The programme helps young people develop necessary independent living skills for when they move into independent accommodation. The ILP is a structured program consisting of 10 modules delivered by partner agencies and Centre staff and the young person's allocated key worker.

The 10 modules are: Induction and orientation; Keyworker introduction; Education; Money and budgeting; Cleaning and hygiene; Local community and safety; Food shopping and cooking; Resettlement; Healthy lifestyles; and Activities.

The Education offer is delivered by a Higher Learning Teaching Assistant, employed by KCC. The education programme is based on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the HLTA works daily with groups of young people to develop their understanding of English, with a thread to support their knowledge and understanding of integrating into UK culture, UK law, what to expect when shopping, making appointments, etc. The education programme is delivered across 4 days, Monday – Thursday. Fridays are often spent for young people to practice their faith. Alongside the education programme, young people have access to MyED app, to continue their own independent learning on iPad, where they can practice English reading, writing and listening and some maths.

Other modules in the ILP may focus on things like developing routines and boundaries, sleep patterns, etc. Cooking is often a significant element of the ILP and something many boys want to do, as it allows them to revisit memories of where they are from, and they are proud to share their culture's food with other boys.

The programme ensures that there is always something going on at the Centre, and there are not long periods of time where the boys have nothing to do and are bored. In the building, there are areas for activities such as a playing pool, as well as quieter spaces for prayer and 1:1 work. A KCC representative noted that one of the concerns from the community was that the young people would have nothing to do and would be in the community, bored – however, the Reception Centres offer a full programme of activities.

A KCC representative highlighted that elements of the ILP offer a natural link into support from the community. For

example, in understanding UK law and culture, Kent Police have been part of meetings with young people to establish positive and trusting relationships with them.

A KCC representative asked stakeholders in the meeting if they had suggestions where the Reception Centre could link into local, community services and organisations are part of the programme for young people. The Reception Centres are very keen to work with local business and to support the community. For example, in Ashford, a local fruiter provides fresh produce for UAS children.

Stakeholders suggested the following services, groups and organisations for Acacia Court to link in with (some already in contact):

- West Faversham Community Centre
- Faversham Foodbank (potential fruit/veg surplus) (KCC Councillor representative to provide contact)
- Allotment committees (KCC Councillor representative to provide contact)
- Various orchards in surrounding area – suggested to contact organisations directly
- Faversham Cricket Club (KCC Councillor representative to provide contact)

A KCC representative thanked stakeholders for their suggestions and stated that the Reception Centre is keen to develop partnerships and contribute to the Faversham community in a positive way.

Stakeholder Questions

A Faversham Town Council representative noted that, from their door-knocking engagement with residents only 2 people had raised concerns about Acacia Court in relation to crime – one of them also commented that the young people were a lot younger than they thought they would be. The Faversham Town Council representative commented that the low-profile approach has been good.

A Faversham Town Council representative queried if the service has taken any special measures during the initial opening period and if the current operations are expected to continue as business as usual. The Faversham Town Council representative also asked if the transfers to other LAs have been completed in the expected timeframes.

A KCC representative confirmed that, when Acacia Court went live in July 2024, the service decided that there would be a phased programme of accommodating children, gradually increasing over time (rather than accommodating to maximum capacity straight away). As the weather improves, further arrivals are expected. And the speed of NTS moves fluctuates also – however, the NTS has been working well. There have been no behaviour issues with any of the boys at the centre and, generally, they are relieved to be in a safe place and are grateful and willing to listen to staff, appreciative of their care and are keen to get involved in activities. They are keen to learn and integrate into society and want to give back to the community – cooking is a significant way in which they show their gratitude.

A KCC Councillor representative asked for the total number of children who have been at Acacia Court since opening in July 2024. A KCC representative confirmed that there have been approx. 75 young people so far (they agreed to double-check this figure and confirm directly with the KCC Councillor representative). A KCC representative commented that this demonstrated the high numbers of children who come in and out of the Reception Centres all of the time – if this has not been noticed, it is positive as it indicates this has not been disruptive to the community.

AOB

A KCC representative stated that the next meeting will be arranged in September/October 2024. The Operations Manager will start to chair these meetings, and they will likely be held on a monthly basis. The meetings will invite in representatives from community organisations. Members currently in the Stakeholder Meeting were advised that they are welcome to continue to be part of these meetings but could also step away from these if they wished to.