



3 March 2025

Dear Resident,

Re: Aspen Lodge, London Road, Sholden, Deal, CT14 0AD

Following our letter on 16 July 2024 we are writing to provide further information and reassurance about Aspen Lodge and its proposed use for unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children.

It is regrettable KCC was unable to share plans for Aspen Lodge with you before July 2024. The necessity to comply with the High Court ruling and accommodate all UAS children who continue to arrive to Kent, meant it was not possible for KCC to consult with residents in ways it would normally and prefer to do.

KCC carefully considers requests for public meetings regarding reception centres for UAS children as we understand communities have questions and we want to keep you updated as much as we can. The council has a responsibility to ensure the safety of those attending meetings and the wider public. Unfortunately, KCC experience shows public meetings relating to asylum seeker accommodation draws in activists and groups from outside communities, who seek to disrupt or cause harm including the distribution of filmed footage and targeting of individuals in attendance. KCC believes it is right to continue its approach of meeting with local councillors and community leaders to hear resident feedback from those they represent and share information, so the centres work well with and alongside their local communities.

On 30 October 2024 and 6 February 2025 KCC held meetings with your local councillors where your questions regarding Aspen Lodge were represented and responded to.

Senior officers for the relevant service areas in KCC, KCC Councillors for Deal and Walmer and senior representatives from: KCC Prevent, Kent Police, NHS Kent and Medway, Dover District Council, Sholden Primary School and Hornbeam Primary School attended the meetings. Dover District Councillors, Deal Parochial CoE Primary, The Downs CoE Primary and Goodwin Academy schools were invited but were unable to attend.

The meetings provided opportunity for discussion regarding the legal context under which KCC is working, 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. Minutes of the meetings are available at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/protecting-children/reception-centres-for-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children/resident-communication> and communication between KCC and stakeholders continues.

We receive enquiries from residents and continue to respond to these as quickly and fully as possible. These enquiries and responses are informing our Frequently Asked Questions webpage: www.kent.gov.uk/receptioncentres, which you can access for information. KCC is working to make this information as accessible as possible for residents.

We would like to encourage residents to continue to use our enquiries mailbox (reception.enquiries@kent.gov.uk) to make any further contact about Aspen Lodge.

We are now recruiting to positions at Aspen Lodge, ranging from Managers to Support Workers, covering day and night shifts. We would like to encourage applications from the local community. Our vacancies and adverts are regularly updated and can be found at: <https://jobs.kent.gov.uk/uasc>

Key points

UAS children are extremely appreciative of the accommodation and support they receive from KCC and are eager to learn about, integrate and contribute positively to UK society.

KCC's experience of running existing reception centres has shown UAS children present extremely minimal risk to local communities.

Aspen Lodge is 1 of 9 reception centres KCC is developing across Kent. 7 are now open, registered with Ofsted and operating well within their communities.

Reception centres are temporary homes for UAS children, whilst they await transfer to the care of other local authorities under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The required timescale for a transfer, set by Central Government, is 10 working days.

All reception centres must register with Ofsted. The intention is to register Aspen Lodge as a children's home for a maximum of 18 UAS children, aged under 16. This means it will be run, inspected and held to the same high standard as children's homes for any other group of children.

Aspen Lodge will have dedicated KCC staff and security on site 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Security will be present to protect against unauthorised access to the site, not because of the children themselves. KCC staff and interpreters will fully orientate each child with the local area, so they understand and respect laws and local customs.

As it will be a temporary home, children will not enrol in local schools. Instead KCC staff will deliver support and activity at the home and supervised activity in the community. This will include English language lessons and guidance on English law and society, giving children the best and earliest opportunity to contribute towards their community, wherever that may be in the UK.

UAS children in the care of KCC are not in detention, they have the same rights to the same level of care as any other child in KCC's care, including access to services and amenities in the local community. Children will be able to independently leave the home for short periods of time, with the agreement of staff about where they will be and when they will return. This will depend on the child's age and individual circumstances.

Robust protocols, already successfully used at KCC's existing reception centres, will be in place at Aspen Lodge. Skilled and experienced social workers meet newly arriving children to assess their needs before they are placed in reception centres. Both social workers and staff at reception centres are trained and experienced in working with vulnerable children and are responsible for keeping children safe at the home and in the community.

Work to the Property

We now anticipate improvement works to Aspen Lodge to be completed by July 2025. Please find a schedule of works below.

- Internal Works – Ongoing to July
- Roof Remedials – March to May
- Demolition of Extension – March
- Mechanical and Electrical Works – Ongoing to July
- Decorations and Floor Coverings – May and June
- Removal of Site Welfare – July

We hope this information provides you with further reassurance regarding Aspen Lodge. 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