

Aspen Lodge Stakeholder Meeting
Thursday 23rd July 2026, 11:00 – 11:30
MS Teams Meeting

Agencies and Services in Attendees
KCC, UAS Children's Service
Sholden Parish Council Representative

Kent County Council (KCC) – Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UAS Children)

Welcome
The KCC representative welcomed everyone to the meeting.
Home Update
A representative from KCC gave an update on Aspen Lodge, stating that since the previous meeting, 36 children have been accommodated at the home, which has remained settled throughout this period. One incident involving a child was reported; however, this had a low impact on the local community and was managed appropriately by the team at Aspen Lodge. The children continue to engage positively with education from Monday to Friday and are increasingly accessing the local community as the weather improves. This has been the busiest period to date, providing the team with valuable experience of the pace and operational demands of the service. Overall, the period has been managed effectively and has supported the team's preparation for the coming months. A representative from Sholden Parish Council asked that since central government has said that there is a decrease in the number of small boats crossing the Channel, has Aspen Lodge noticed a smaller number of children coming into the service? A KCC representative answered this by stating that numbers are broadly consistent with the same period last year, both month by month and across the service as a whole. Children represent only a small proportion of those making the crossing, although the adult-to-child ratio is not known. Current projections indicate that numbers are likely to remain similar for the rest of the year, and planning is being based on this assumption. The service has been busier than at the start of the year, with higher numbers of children accommodated at the same time.
Protest Update
A KCC representative informed the attendees that at the beginning of the month, an unexpected pop-up protest took place outside Aspen Lodge. The individuals involved were not from the local community but from an external organisation that has targeted multiple Children's Homes and Reception Centres. As a precaution, the children and staff followed lockdown procedures, moving to a designated safe area where no one entered or left. Police attended promptly and dispersed the protesters quickly. The incident lasted approximately 28 minutes, including around 10 minutes during which banners were displayed, and photographs of the property were taken. The protesters later moved on to another local home.
Community Tensions
A KCC representative said that a complaint was received following the protest regarding the number of police officers outside Aspen Lodge, which led to a concern that a child at the home may have posed a potential risk to a member of the public. There are no concerns or identified risks to staff or members of the public from the children. The police attendance was solely in response to the protest. This also led to a misunderstanding that the school had gone into lockdown, which was not the case. A KCC representative has spoken with a representative from the school, who confirmed that everything was fine, and the individual was reassured to hear that the home continues to operate well. However, the representative from the school did raise concerns about people smoking near the school. This involved staff members and is being addressed. As Aspen Lodge is a children's home, there is no

designated smoking area, so some staff had been smoking on the unadopted road to the side of the building. The team has been reminded of the need to find a more suitable location and to avoid causing concern to the school or local community.

A KCC representative mentioned that a complaint had also been raised with regards to parking outside of the home. A representative from Sholden Parish Council confirmed that they had received a complaint of two cars parking on the pavement in front of Aspen Lodge. The KCC representative confirmed that staff do not park in front of the building. There is allocated parking at the rear of Aspen Lodge, and staff also use other appropriate parking areas. Some contractors have previously parked at the front, but they have been asked to move elsewhere. There is frequent parking outside Aspen Lodge, particularly during school drop-off and pick-up times; however, most of this appears to be from members of the public attending the school or visiting the shop. The team at Aspen Lodge continues to manage the situation as effectively as possible and remain mindful of the impact on the local community.

A KCC representative informed the meeting that a further complaint was received from another resident regarding occasional noise levels, particularly when staff arrive late for evening shifts and noise can be heard from cars, including phone calls or radios. This has been raised with staff. However, Aspen Lodge operates as a 24-hour service and must continue to meet the needs of the children. There have been no issues with loud music or children playing football late at night. The focus is on working constructively with the individual while continuing to operate effectively as a home. A representative has spoken with the resident, and it is hoped the matter has now been resolved.

A KCC representative relayed that following a discussion with a representative from the school, there has been a request that future meetings are not scheduled during school holidays, as representatives are unable to attend during those periods. The KCC representative confirmed that Aspen Lodge will aim to arrange meetings during term time to enable a representative from the school to attend. The representative from the school confirmed that they have no current concerns or matters to raise.

A representative from Sholden Parish Council stated that nobody had reported the unexpected pop-up protest to them, as the public had gone directly to Aspen Lodge to raise any concerns. They confirmed that the Sholden Parish Council had not received any complaints about the protest or Aspen Lodge.

The representative from KCC said that a representative from the school had left later than usual on that evening and saw the protest on their way home. The incident lasted less than 30 minutes, and the group dispersed quickly. The banner was displayed for around 10 minutes, so it appeared to be a small group of approximately a dozen people gathered outside.

A representative from Sholden Parish Council asked for the date of the unexpected pop-up protest. A representative from KCC confirmed that this occurred on the evening of 2nd July 2026.

No further questions or issues raised.

Any Other Business

None raised.