

Cypress House (formerly Edward Moore) Stakeholder Meeting

Tuesday 30th June, 10:00 – 10:30

MS Teams Meeting

Agencies and Services in Attendees
KCC, UAS Children's Service
GBC, Councillor
KCC, Councillor
KCC, Prevent
Kent Police

Kent County Council (KCC) – Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) - UAS Children's Service - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UAS Children)

Introduction
Introductions made and agenda shared.
Overview
A KCC Representative advised that Cypress House currently accommodates 18 young people. Occupancy has been lower in recent weeks, reducing from approximately 24 young people the previous week to 18 at the time of the meeting. The home has 36 bedrooms and reached full capacity last summer. Occupancy is expected to increase again as the year progresses. A KCC Representative reported that there had been no missing episodes or runaway incidents involving young people currently accommodated at Cypress House. Staff continue to support several young people who experienced significant trauma before arriving in the United Kingdom. One young person, who has a disability following a traumatic injury, was due to transfer to a new local authority through the National Transfer Scheme on the day of the meeting. Young people continue to engage positively in a variety of activities, including swimming, football, boxing, gym sessions at Cascades, museum visits, trips to Rochester Castle, and learning to use public transport and trains independently. A KCC Representative noted that lower occupancy levels have enabled staff to provide high-quality support and make a positive impact on young people's experiences and development. A GBC Councillor stated that initial concerns about Cypress House had been addressed and that the home is now accepted within the local community. They noted that staff transparency and positive local relationships had significantly reduced community concerns. It was also noted that Cypress House benefits from supportive local organisations, including a nearby primary school and the Gurdwara. A GBC Councillor said staff should be recognised for their hard work, commitment, and positive community engagement, which has supported the home's successful integration locally. A KCC Councillor asked how activity costs are funded. A KCC Representative advised that activities are funded through the Home Office budget and confirmed that further details could be provided by email.

A KCC Councillor asked about a young person who had a disability.

A KCC Representative confirmed that the injury and disability occurred before the young person arrived in the United Kingdom. The case was highlighted as an example of the complex needs and traumatic experiences some young people have faced.

A Kent Police representative asked why occupancy was expected to increase.

A KCC Representative explained that arrivals are often affected by seasonal weather patterns, as young people usually arrive via Channel crossings. More favourable spring and summer weather typically leads to higher numbers than during winter.

A KCC Prevent representative added that young people complete a structured assessment before accommodation is allocated according to their needs. Some move directly through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), while others are placed in reception centres such as Cypress House.

A Kent Police representative advised that local police would welcome closer engagement with Cypress House and would be interested in visiting the service to introduce themselves and build relationships with staff and young people.

A KCC Representative confirmed that the Cypress House email address and direct contact details would be shared. They also confirmed that police officers are welcome to visit the home and engage with the young people.

A Kent Police representative added that regular communication would help reduce barriers and strengthen partnership working between the service and local policing teams.

A GBC Councillor agreed and emphasised the importance of young people developing positive views of policing in the United Kingdom. They noted that some young people may have had very different experiences of law enforcement in their countries of origin, making constructive engagement with local police particularly valuable in building trust and confidence.

Volunteering and Community Contribution

A KCC Representative asked whether attendees knew of any local volunteering opportunities that would enable young people to contribute to the community.

A KCC Councillor suggested Gravesham Borough Council's Street Champions scheme, which allows participants to adopt a local street and help keep it clean. The community-led scheme promotes civic pride and provides equipment such as litter pickers and collection bags. This would give young people an opportunity to make a visible and positive contribution locally.

A GBC Councillor strongly endorsed the idea and recommended a contact, who coordinates the initiative. They noted that around 890 Street Champions are currently involved. The scheme is strongly community-focused, with participants often working together in groups. The organiser would likely be willing to visit Cypress House and deliver a presentation about the programme.

A KCC Representative agreed to look into the opportunity further and complete any required risk assessments. Staff may also take part alongside the young people.

Community Tension

A KCC Prevent representative provided an update on community cohesion and local tensions. There are currently no specific concerns affecting Gravesham, and no significant local issues relating to Cypress House have been identified.

A KCC Prevent representative advised that some tensions linked to immigration issues have been experienced elsewhere in Kent and Medway. The Prevent team remains in regular contact with police and partner agencies about community tensions and emerging risks.

A KCC Prevent representative referenced a recent incident involving an unprovoked attack. They explained that misinformation, including AI-generated content, was shared online. Some people wrongly believed the visitors were connected to a proposed asylum accommodation site. Police communications and clarification from Kent County Council helped correct the misinformation, and a planned protest was later cancelled after accurate information was published. They highlighted this as an example of the increasing challenges caused by misinformation and the misuse of artificial intelligence.

A KCC representative advised that, around four weeks before the meeting, a member of the public attended Cypress House seeking information about the service. Staff followed the appropriate protocol and did not provide information at the door. The individual was given the relevant contact details and advised how to submit a formal information request, which was then managed through official channels. It was later clarified that the individual's concerns were based on previous experience supporting asylum seekers in hotels, and that they were seeking reassurance about the safeguarding arrangements in place at Cypress House.

A KCC Representative outlined the safeguarding and security measures in place at Cypress House. Young people receive regular guidance and support on staying safe in the local community. Staff have also been advised not to wear identifiable lanyards in public following previous concerns about being filmed or recorded.

Cypress House also maintains positive relationships with local community organisations, including the Gurdwara. Discussions have taken place about potentially a safe location being selected if unexpected protest activity occurs near the home.

Staff receive weekly updates on protests and community tensions to support planning, risk assessment, and preparedness.

A KCC representative concluded the meeting and thanked attendees.

AOB

None raised.