Housing Strategy & Enabling Sub Group

MINUTES – Tuesday 26th January 2016

Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford Kent

**Attending**: Jennifer Shaw, Co Chair & Ashford BC; Liz Crockford, Co Chair & Sevenoaks DC; Tessa O’Sullivan, ACRK; Chris Knowles, TMBC; Sandra Sainsbury, Shepway DC; Arron Nicholls, Medway Council; Jane Griffiths, BPHA; Heather Stoner and Hannah Gates, HCA; Lauren Hemsley, Thanet DC ; Sarah Lewis, Tunbridge Wells BC; Andrew Palmer, Canterbury City Council; David Jeffrey, Ashford BC; Rebecca Smith, KHG

**Apologies**: Brian Horton, KHG; Andrew Connors and Tony Stewart, Maidstone Borough Council;

**Visitors**: Ted Reddick & Nicholas Cronk, Landspeed Homes Limited, Peter Griffiths, Landspeed Homes Limited Consultant

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| **ITEM** | **NOTES** | **ACTION** |
| **Introductions and Apologies** | Noted around the table. |  |
| **Minutes and Matters Arising** | Minutes agreed as accurate.  Page 2 – RS updated about the Welfare Reform Session planned for 10th February. Since the KHG EXB meeting on 20th January the focus of the session has altered, this is now a discussion between housing providers and local authorities about the future of housing in Kent and Medway, this is about the true impact of all the announcements and reform upon the business planning, the primary focus of member organisations and who and how we will be housing now and in the future. The Housing, Planning and Developer workshop session will be postponed until there is further understanding and detail about the Housing and Planning Bill, RS will share details when available. The main representative for KHG from each member organisation has been invited and will delegate attendance if they are unable to attend. Marion Money, Ross Gill, Melanie Anthony, Kerry Parr and Nick Fenton have been invited to participate in the discussion.  RS also advised that the Kent Welfare Reform Group met in December. The group had wide representation and discussed the key issues and impacts around welfare reform across the services. It was agreed that William Benson, CEX of TWBC and Chair of the group would take these issues in a presentation to his CEX colleagues, possibly in March. RS is working with Tim Woolmer and Debra Exall at KCC who support William to work on the data and information to share with the CEX’s. RS to share minutes of the sub group meeting when available.  Page 3 – LC advised that Sevenoaks had a response from correspondence to Greg Clark from Brandon Lewis; LC will share if able to do. | **RS to share when available** |
| **KMHS Refresh Update** | RS advised that work on the KMHS has stalled, with a lot of detail yet to come forward on elements that will impact upon the content of the strategy it is difficult to move this forward. It is likely that the completion of the strategy will be towards the end of 2016, earlier if possible. RS and BH are to continue dialogue with Ross Gill at KCC and Kerry Parr, once the internal issues at KCC around Devolution are finalised this will also assist with finalising elements of the document.  With regards to the SELEP RS updated that there is a pilot partnership arrangement with the Housing Finance Institute (Natalie Elphick). The HFI is now established and there has been a recent article in Inside Housing. The last LEP Board agreed to pilot and sponsor six LA’s through the Housing Ready Programme, developing a plan for creative responses to delivery. In Kent Ashford is taking this on, 11th February this commences, Maidstone BC are also undertaking this work to. There are discussions with other authorities in the whole SELEP area. If the pilots are successful there will be a recommendation to roll this out to all authorities. The LEP is recruiting a new Director and Chair; David Godfrey is now on secondment at Greg Clark’s office.  There was a discussion around devolution; CK provided the group with some background about the devolution process and how the position for Kent is different than for other areas across the Country. HS advised that Essex have put their proposal forward to Government. |  |
| **HCA Update** | HS provided a brief the group with an update regarding the HCA, RS to share the written brief sent to KHG colleagues last week which contains more detail.  Homelessness Change and Platform for Life Fund was announced in December, no bids for Kent. There are no updates on the CASSH 2 bids, HS is chasing this regularly and information will be shared when available. Direct Commissioning for Government for its land, there will be a pilot of this in Kent. There is also the Starter Homes Initiative, it isn’t yet confirmed whether the HCA will administer. This is a loan fund to help prepare sites for starter homes.  The prospectus for the new AHP is towards March/April. Within the HCA the CEX is moving on at the end of March. The HCA is also under an Arm’s Length Company review, which is expected to have outcomes in the Spring, with these ranging from no longer existing to expansion.  LC raised the point about rural housing, how you address the need for rented rural housing if it is unaffordable or not viable to deliver in areas of high land and housing cost, is it useful to identify new affordable rented rural delivery as part of housing needs surveys?  SL questioned why there is a need for loans for the developers on starter homes, HG advised this is about assisting with unlocking land, its front funding the site to get it ready for development. There is still little detail around this initiative coming forward currently. CK advised that feedback from RP’s and developers is that the loan value per unit may impact upon the price or cost appraisal for the land owner, who may be inclined to push up the price of land.  There was a discussion about local connection and shared ownership, HS advised that colleagues should refer to the Capital Funding Guide for clarification about such issues. HS to look into older s106 agreements and feedback about the issue around resale and criteria with regards to letting/selling. | **RS to share KHG HCA Brief with HSEG Colleagues**  **HS to feedback via RS or at next meeting** |
| **Help to Buy** | JG has shared the update to colleagues as they are provided in the Capital Funding Guide. BPHA will be contacting all applicants who were homeowners and were declined by BPHA or a local authority as the criteria has changed, the same applies to those whose income was too high, as this criteria has now changed. This will be gradual correspondence.  There will still be close working with the priority group, the MOD. There has been communication with housing association colleagues about prioritisation of three bed homes, to see what single people or couples are purchasing in terms of size of the home and what they can afford. There haven’t been many of these but they do not need agreement from the HCA to do this.  New leaflets with new criteria are being developed, the website is all updated and the leaflet will be uploaded when ready. Application/interest have increased, the changes are as of the 4th January 2016, although some websites are stating April 2016, HS to take this back to the Communications colleagues at HCA.  JG questioned whether colleagues have heard that Mortgage Guarantee will cease in December 2016, colleagues were unaware. The Home Show is in Dartford on 24th April and there is another event in Lingfield, Surrey in March. Lots of developers and providers will be attending the show, colleagues asked to promote these two shows.  LC asked colleagues whether there was merit in inviting some RP colleagues to a future meeting to discuss the issues around shared ownership, criteria and checks as the focus on shared ownership increases. RS to note for future agenda, Moat, Orbit and Hyde were suggested registered providers. | **RS to liaise with LC and JS on who to invite and when** |
| **KHG Update** | KHG are planning to respond to the NPPF consultation, the deadline for colleagues to share responses was 25th January and there have been four responses to date so RS to review what the content is. RS also starting to refresh and review the next edition of the KHG Dashboard.  The KHG Seminar is progressing, with Dr Jessica Allen and Gavin Smart confirmed as keynote speakers, with a varied selection of workshops and another market place for delegates to network. There has been correspondence circulated by RS and JP about the early booking price, this deal ends on the 31st January.  Work continues to review and update the KHG website, once a third proposal is received this will be reviewed by a small working group and a decision taken about next steps. The aim of the new website is to provide members with an information portal, a place to share information about what KHG is undertaken, what is has achieved, to reduce the amount of email correspondence, duplication of information shared and to enhance the user experience.  RS to share the Kent Fuel Poverty Strategy consultation link with HSEG colleagues to enable comment. | **RS to note** |
| **Landspeed Homes Ltd** | Ted, Nicholas and Peter introduced themselves and provided a presentation to the group, which is shared with the minutes. RS to share contact details for them.  Landspeed Homes Limited are intermediate housing specialists, offering both shared ownership and shared equity housing options as part of their housing options offer. There is no charge on the unpurchased balance. They can also provide independent mortgage advice and can assist with issues around viability or a stall in development with s106 agreements, with the aim to trouble shoot and enable delivery of units. They do not need or use grant to deliver units. Delivery can be on sites with small numbers, the max number of units delivered to date is 29.  Landspeed are going to make representation and respond to the NPPF consultation.  Mortgage lending attitudes can impact upon the delivery of schemes, not all mortgage lenders are able to offer the right product for the intermediate models on offer. Landspeed can provide examples of the need for studio and 1 bed units, that those purchasing or accessing are not always the same as those how register for housing with a local authority. They are also able to provide after sales and completion analysis about who has bought, the income thresholds and other potential clients with a housing need that can be met by this delivery approach.  The biggest barrier to homeownership is the ability for an buyer to raise a deposit, Landspeed are offering a pathway to homeownership that offers less financial burden, they can offer and it is part of the presentation about the cost comparison between the products on offer and the financial backing required to obtain them.  With regards to space standards on smaller units the size and layout of the units will determine the delivery numbers on a site, this improves the viability of schemes and also the local markets, looking at the number and mix of units on offer. With regards to service charges there is always the ambition to keep these as low as possible.  Landspeed are keen to work with colleagues about the concept of Local Household Income Thresholds, this is about working in the local area to ensure that those with lower income levels are not excluded from opportunities to access homeownership products. Landspeed are also happy to retain and honour existing local connection criteria when applicable to a developing scheme. They can also provide monthly mortgage costing , demonstrating the significantly lower costing for the intermediate products offered by Landspeed.  There are photos of recent schemes that can be shared via RS, these will demonstrate how well designed and spacious the smaller units of accommodation are.  Questions – SL questioned is there is price per unit cost? It was confirmed that this is the case, a unit price is agreed and they buy as any other purchaser would.  JS asked about stair casing opportunities, it was confirmed that for both shared ownership and equity there is the opportunity to fully staircase out, there are no restrictions place and there is no burden to undertake this if not required by the owner.  With regards to resale the lease agreement regarding the unsold share is rolled on to the next purchaser, the property for sale is advertised on the Help to Buy website and they honour nomination agreements on resales too.  JG confirmed that as the Help to Buy Agent they offer the broad brush marketing approach, they are not an organisation there to sell RP properties, they are to get all those who have a desire and are eligible for homeownership on the right list. Landspeed confirmed that for the first 6 weeks of completion all properties are advertised exclusively through the Help to Buy agenda. |  |
| **Discussion Session** | *Alternative Methods of Affordable Housing Delivery* – JS advised that it would be useful to share any information about alternative methods of delivery, RS to share the presentation by Heylo at the recent KHG meeting, JS is developing a table of information around this and will share when finalised for colleagues. AN advised that Medway have had a presentation from a collaborative that delivers a model and offers community based activities alongside. Medway Council were unable to progress but did advise them to contact others, it’s a model backed by Colliers and Aviva.  CK advised that Maidstone BC have some good useful information in their new housing strategy, it was agreed that RS would ask Maidstone to run through their new strategy and content as an agenda item for March. SL to share the presentation from Rent Plus. CK also mentioned the issue of supported accommodation and how this will progress, are there are any examples that can be shared? HS advised that until benefit impacts are clarified schemes are likely to stall.  *RTB2 & Rural Exception Sites* – TS advised that ERHA have stated they will offer a portable discount but not allowing a RTB of their units, unsure of other provider’s approaches. Rural Starter Homes on Exception Sites is an ongoing issue. The ERHA proposal will have to rely on other providers coming forward with a suitable property for a person to exercise their offer of a portable discount.  *Housing Needs Surveys & affordability* – TS advised that they have conducted a recent survey and asked the question of the Parish Council about supporting a scheme if tenants had the RTB, this was a survey with a 29% response rate, the survey concluded that they would not support a scheme with RTB eligibility. It was agreed to keep this discussion item on the agenda as a standing item. | **RS to note** |
| **HSEG Action Plan** | The group went through the action plan for HSEG.  *Objective 1* - The KMHS is on-going and has been discussed earlier in the meeting.  *Objective 2* – CK advised that Moat no longer convert on re-let anyway, HS advised that this started early in the 11-15 programme. Each HA has an existing target regarding conversions and this can’t be increased in the 15-18 programme. HS advised that providers are to follow or refer to the Capital Funding Guide with regards to disposal, the HCA do not have any influence over such decisions but it does go through the regulation arm of HCA. LH advised that there is potential in the Thanet district for more disposals by one particular provider.  LC commented that historically there has been an agreement regarding capping rents to LHA levels but have seen recent approaches to review this agreement, AP has experienced similar with Canterbury and a provider. SL advised that many providers are reviewing their affordability criteria and the potential impact on the housing register and who is bidding and letting homes.  JS suggested that it would be useful to understand who is on the housing register and is excluded to bid for properties in relation to income; do we need that evidence to demonstrate what need is being responded to? SL agreed to help CK with this, what is available to extract and what is useful for the group to consider.  *Objective 3* – RS advised that there have been updates made to this protocol by the NMSG but this has stalled and there is a discussion required about the role and purpose of the protocol going forward. At KHG it was suggested to look at this again once work on the KMHS progresses.  *Objective 4* – The protocol has been drafted and shared with the group previously, just waiting on clarity on some elements (RTB) before this can be shared with KHG EXB for endorsement. It was agreed to monitor the protocol annually rather than quarterly.  *Objective 5* – Older Persons Housing – agreed to pick this up through the refresh of the strategy, working and conscious of the objectives within the KCC Accommodation Strategy, this will be considered when the work on the KMHS resumes.  *Objective 6* – To wait on the Housing and Planning Bill and any role or need for a Kent and Medway Tenancy Strategy.  *Objective 7* – AN happy to continue to produce the benchmarking data, all to note when requests come through for information or data sets. | **SL and CK to note** |
| **AOB** | RS reminded the group that the next meeting will be on a Thursday 17th March and will be hosted by Swale BC at their Civic Centre. Details about the meeting and parking will be shared closer to the meeting date.  TS advised that one recent survey identified a need for three bed units but the provider board would not support the development of these sized units due to affordability and income levels. What questions should be asked on the surveys, TS to go to providers with these questions, as there is clarity going forward it would be useful to look closely at the questions asked within surveys and future provision of rented homes.  LH gave apologies for the next meeting in March, will see if Ashley can attend for Thanet.  DJ advised that he recently attended the KHG meeting and an issue regarding a provider and Fire Safety in Construction. There is a document BS991 2015 about fire safety and design and this is not just about Extra Care buildings but applicable to all developments. There is a meeting in Ashford on the 18th May regarding fire safety in construction, RS to share details when available, but for colleagues to be aware of the regulations and need to consider fire safety and design at the beginning of a development.  AP advised that a recent planning application has come back from KCC about a minimum number of wheelchair accessible units and whether others have experienced this? CK advised that TMBC have experienced this, they have advised KCC that if they wish to have this considered it is more useful to receive this at early points in the life of the application, as it gets harder to implement any steers towards the end of the process. KCC have also asked for nomination rights to these units if developed. CK advised that presently the LPAs had discretion over the "asks" of KCC in relation to some consultation suggestions  SL asked TS if it was too late to send over rural housing statistics, TS advised to share and she will pass on accordingly.  HS advised that HCA may not be able to attend the meeting in Swale, if not they will send a written update.  CK advised that Circle Housing Russet are moving on with the merger with Affinity Sutton, this will make them one of the largest providers in the Country.  LC asked if anyone has taken the decision to undertake a housing market and needs assessment, no one advised that they had. | **ALL to note**  **RS to note**  **RS to share link to document**  **RS to share when available** |

***Thank you to Ashford Borough Council for hosting***