**KENT HOUSING OPTIONS GROUP**

**NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON**

**15 Sept 2016**

**Maidstone BC, Maidstone House**

**Present:** Marie Gerald, Chair and Dartford BC; Jane Smither, T & M BC; Mark Breathwick, Medway; Council; Elly Toye, Dover DC; Vicky May, Thanet DC; Bev Jackson, Shepway DC; Ellie Kershaw, Maidstone BC; Stuart Clifton, Maidstone; Vicky Hodson, Kent Homechoice; Sowei Smith,Sevenoaks: Lesley Clay, Kent JPPB; **Guests:** Margaret Wood Kent SSAFA

**Apologies:**  Deborah White, WKHA, Sylvia Roberts, Ashford BC, Linda Lauris, Gravesham, Lora McCourt, Canterbury, Jane Lang, TWells, Jill Pells, KHG

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| **1.** | **Minutes and matters arising** | MG would like to ask that a representative from each LHA attend KHOG if HO managers are unable to attend as attendance from some LHAs has been infrequent.  VM is having problems with SCS closing down referrals via Intentional Homeless with Children protocol and then opening case again after a couple of weeks. MG suggested that if closed, client can self refer to SCS.  Minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2016 were agreed and the Action Plan updated. |  |
| **2.** | **SSAFA** | Charity founded in 1885 to raise funds to help soldiers and sailors going to the 2nd expeditionary force to Egypt. There was no welfare structure e.g. for wives and families and a huge amount of money was raised. By 1890 there was a housing store at Plymouth so troops and families could get warm clothes on return from India. 1st WW SSAFA was asked to pay war widows’ pensions etc, as there was no structure to do so from Government. By 1918, RBL was setting up housing, setting up the poppy factory etc and SSAFA do the smaller things. SSAFA today has a professional side, e.g. medical staff, social workers. RAF use SSAFA world wide for social work. They also have a voluntary side on bases, fund raising for needs on that base. Voluntary part working with veterans, working on a one to one basis to try to solve problems. There is a central part to pull all of this together and there is a sharing of ideas. The whole of SSAFA in Kent is run by volunteers. There are teams of case workers across Kent. E.g. if someone needs housing, SSAFA would send a case worker out to complete an application form. This form is used across the services to apply for funding from the various services. Try to help with deposit and first month’s rent by working with the relevant benevolent fund.  If trying to arrange housing, SSAFA would ask estate agent for all of the charges, rent in advance, etc before applying for funds. MW cited a case of paying B&B for a person who failed the habitual residency test. The group advised MW to appeal decision and JS, as SP lead, has given contact details to MW for future queries.  SSAFA supplies support for various needs which veterans/families cannot supply themselves, e.g. support for siblings to get together, family stays while SP receiving treatment. SSAFA also acts as an adoption agency for SP.  VM – are referrals from people who have left services a few years ago or recently. MW confirmed that they have both. Results of a survey from SSAFA shows that they are dealing with more younger people now. So about 50/50. The main problem for the younger group is homelessness and they are often those who have only served for a short while. MW confirmed that they tell homeless clients to contact the LHA.  MG suggested that the Kent SSAFA team contact the LHA leads re any queries re housing needs.  MG suggested that some training is delivered re homelessness/housing need to the case workers.  VM is holding a drop in information session for professionals. Case workers invited.  LC mentioned meeting with Kate Parkin. Kate has led Covenant activity in Sussex for some time including Sussex Armed Forces Network and Sussex Pathways. She has recently been appointed on behalf of all Kent CCGs as covenant health lead for Kent in addition to her work in Sussex and will become the single point of contact for all military/health issues as well as replicating Sussex Pathways in Kent and redesigning and relaunching Kent & Medway Armed Forces Network. It’s about educating anyone working with veteran community on issues that make the veteran population different. Kate mentioned the Champions training which is free. Details of this on KHG/JPPB website in the News section. <http://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/> | **MW to send to LC *(attached)***  **LC to give details of KHOG members to MW *(done)***  **VM to send details to LC**  ***(done)*** |
| **3.** | **Homeless Reduction Bill** | Proposal is that LHA accommodates every homeless person for 56 days. Potential financial challenge for district councils. EK and Amber Christou were invited by Crisis to talks. Consensus of opinion from LHAs who attended was that if the bill goes through in this form that districts would become bankrupt. Rep from Wales said that initial approaches have increased, but applications have gone down. He did not think that the proposed bill is workable for England. Also, no local connection required.  Wording in Welsh system is that duty is to assist preventing homeless. Welsh model does place an emphasis on people helping themselves as well within the prevention model. Duty will also start from S21 notice. John Littlemore is at a ministerial meeting today and this is on the agenda.  VH – Locata looking at some changes in advance of the bill.  Dartford is carrying out a service review and will only be taking referrals on line. Duty officer will pick these up. Welsh websites explain the system and how the service works.  KHOG will work together to look at systems and processes and website information.  Swale BC and MBC and Medway now take telephone calls (unless there is a vulnerability) rather than face to face and make appointments. Gravesham using a digital system.  Potential date 28th September pm at Swale BC VH to check room availability. | **MG to send key points to LC to disseminate**  **EK will send her submission to be circulated**  ***(attached)***  **LC to circulate dates for a separate meeting**  ***(done)***  **LC to circulate template re methodology in each LHA**  ***(attached)*** |
| **4.** | **Affordability and statutory duty** | HAs are now in a position where they are checking affordability for those moving into their accommodation, pending the changes in LHA rates for social housing in April 17. This mostly affects those on housing benefit. MG is part of task and finish group and is presenting the LHA view. Most HAs are thinking of creating their own waiting lists so that they can look at who can afford their properties. MG has decided to create Lettings Returns for the RPs. VH stated that this will be easier for Kent Homechoice to do. MG mentioned that it may be useful to be an affordability calculator to go on to Kent Homechoice.  VH mentioned that Kent Homechoice feels this should be at point of application (on the system).  MG suggested at T&F group that the HAs come up with a common affordability form. There will be a workshop in October for discussion. | **MG to circulate questions in a table and all to come back with comments** |
| **5.** | **Recent Case Law** | This is on Nearly Legal blog re significance of vulnerability.  MG states that if LHAs use external reviewers to make sure that this is signed off by members. |  |
| **6.** | **Training Opportunities** | VM is considering arranging for Shelter to deliver some training re illegal evictions and would like to know interest.  LC mentioned the LGBT training commissioned by JPPB which will be offered free to LHA HO staff. There are 17 places remaining.  SC –MBC is hosting training on Care Act Training – have some places 21st October | **All – to contact VM**  **All to contact LC**  **All to contact SC** |
| **7.** | **AOB** | MG – Letter went to all LHAs re dispersal of UASC. But not relevant to Kent as Kent has over and above the national average.  LC mentioned MECC training and E module learning. Group felt that E – learning is not viable for front line staff.  ET – Would like to consider everyone doing the rough sleeper count on the same day this year. Some LHAs are doing an estimated count. VM looking at verification on w/C14 November.  MB – There is someone from Home Office who deals with deportation wants to be involved in the RS counts either by info or taking part.  SC – there was a very good webinair: Replacement for Temporary Accommodation Management Fee which may be very useful to all.  LC asked for a volunteer to take minutes at the next meeting as it is unlikely that Jill will be back and both LC and Rebecca Smith are unavailable that day. VH kindly volunteered (and without a push!) | **MB to forward details**  **SC to forward details of TA webinair details.**  ***(attached)*** |
| **8.** | **Next Meeting** | **The next meeting (Full Meeting) will be at 10am on 27th October 2016 at MBC** |  |