**KENT HOUSING OPTIONS GROUP**

**NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON**

**16 June 2016**

**Maidstone BC, Maidstone House**

**Present:** Marie Gerald, Chair and Dartford BC; Deborah White, KHG Mentor and WKHA; Jane Smither, T & M BC; Amber Christou, Swale BC; Mark Breathwick, Medway Council; Elly Toye, Dover DC; Vicky May, Thanet DC; Bev Jackson, Shepway DC; Ellie Kershaw, Maidstone BC; Jane Lang, Tunbridge Wells BC; Andrew Kefford, Sevenoaks DC; Damien Olley, Canterbury CC; Lesley Clay, Kent JPPB; Linda Lauris, Gravesham BC; Jill Pells, KHG;

**Guests:** Gary Messenger, Homelesslink,

**Apologies:**  Sarah Robson, Shepway DC; Sylvia Roberts, Ashford BC

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| **1.** | **Minutes and matters arising** | Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2016 were agreed and the Action Plan updated.  Noted that YP pilot is delayed. AC and JL met with KCC to address some issues and raise concerns. ET advised regarding an email to SR at ABC which referred to issues around finance.  JS has had contact from two separate social workers this week with a request for homeless applications for young people.  LC suggesting that the status quo for the protocol should now stand as this action has been outstanding since 2013. Agreed to be removed from the Action List.  Welsh position – Gill Leng advised the pre-meeting regarding looking at what the government offices can do to support LAs. Not only duty to prevent but also other issues. Nothing from DCLG currently so nothing for LAs to work with. AC raised need to reinvigorate the private sector – 6 week limit on TA is unachievable in the current climate. AC feels that there is a need to produce information for members to show spend on TA, etc for the whole of Kent and Medway. GM suggested the work London has done could be used as a template – MG happy to share her overview report to Dartford members which has information on market rents, etc.  Discussion regarding information to tenants and landlords regarding legal rights of occupation. Agreed for JP to circulate ABC information for a starting point to produce something. EK also to circulate information from MBC which gives the same information.  JP to circulate Peter Dosad’s letter to Accommodate UK Ltd relating to information give to private sector tenants with minutes. | **MG**  **JP (done)**  **EK**  **JP (done)** |
| **2.** | **Research for LGA Policy Position on Homelessness** | There was a separate meeting with Gill Leng regarding this research. |  |
| **3.** | **Goodbye to Gary** | GM thanked the group for his involvement with them over the years. He is impressed that there has been considerable progress with regard to rough sleepers and has always felt welcome despite gap between government and the sector. He thanked the Group for their openness and sense of humour at meetings despite dealing with very challenging situations.  Regarding the situation with Homelesslink - Homeless funding – will probably just deal direct with what officers are left. Homelesslink was being funded by DCLG and this has had an impact. Feeling is that DCLG want to break good working relationships up so that blame culture can be reinstated. GM had collaboration with LAs high on his Agenda which he achieved.  With regard to GM’s future plans, he will be having a break to consider what he wants to do – perhaps modular housing. He will let the group have his details and may well attend a future meeting to speak to the group about modular housing. He also offered to share a presentation on this from a recent meeting. | **GM** |
| **4.** | **Service Personnel Sub Group and Haig Housing** | Haig is developing a couple of interesting schemes, a Veterans Accommodation pathway working with Stoll and Riverside. Riverside provides hostel accommodation; Stoll will buy or build accommodation; Haig will provide move on.  Haig has acquired properties in Colchester and Aldershot. At the moment those properties don’t have veterans in them, but now have the potential to take applicants. Haig is now starting to take referrals from any part of the country and can take direct applicants. Funding from MOD allowed some new units to be built on existing estate in Morden. 8 one bed flats designed for single service users and rent will be set at a rate where shared room rate will not affect them. Again, Haig takes direct referrals. There are 68 new homes altogether and a third will be one bed but currently awaiting planning permission. So potentially there will be 76 new homes and 40 of these will be one bed which will give comfort to the authority with the SP accommodation that there will be some opportunities to move on.  Recently DIY SOS – BBC, turned 8 houses into 5 homes using SP to help refurbish and the end result is that there will be another 17 homes. Haig has now been inundated with offers from developers and others, but can only work with LA investment and some sort of revenue feed from an alternative source. If there is any interest please contact Jude Millett at Manchester CC |  |
| **5.** | **Referrals to Maidstone BC** | EK – MBC have had people approach from other areas claiming that they have been told the other LA cannot help them. MG noted that while we have no control over Bexley (who may be doing this) in Kent we should be adhering to protocols. Acknowledged that Kent authorities need to communicate with our partners if this situation arises.  AC suggested that the loyalty has to be rebuilt – need more opportunities to liaise and train together as while the officers who meet at KHOG may have good relationships this may not be the case with other colleagues, particularly those on the front line.  Need to keep an eye n this situation – MG.  EK –made plea for help from other LA partners as the Hospital and Fleming House cause difficulties, although it is acknowledged that other areas also have problems locally. Need to do some work with probation and hospital.  AC advised that she has had some success with joint working and she will ask Roxanne to bring further information on this to this group.  JL - Julie Delahay (OT) at Priority House is working well with this and will be attending JPPB. LC advised that JPPB on 7 July will devote the whole meeting to issues around hospital discharge and disabled adaptations and if anyone would like to attend please let LC know.  Agreed to have a Standing item on **Protocols** on KHOG Agenda.  JL and Janice Greenwood (TWells PSH Team) are meeting with Penbury Hospital Discharge Officer soon to try to find a way forward with this. LC suggested that this person is invited to JPPB. | **ALL**  **JL** |
| **6.** | **S202 Review Letters** | ET – DDC has a standard template (Andy Gale) but asked about additional information re Mohammed – do others send two letters? Group confirmed that most send two letters (Thanet puts them in the same envelope!).  MB to share Medway correspondence.  Training on reviews – Shelter doing this in August but need specific training for reviewers. Could possibly tailor this training to meet need. | **MB** |
| **7.** | **Affordability Task Group** | MG attended a Task Group to discuss an affordability calculator developed by T & C HG which can then indicate if a person is able to afford to rent a property. T & C HG are currently meeting with LAs to demonstrate this.  Noted that other HAs (and some LAs) also have similar affordability checks although they might have differing criteria.  EK advised that MBC do a similar calculation for potential landlords and have been challenged for not including such items as an allowance for tobacco.  Established that we need to work towards finding some core things that LAs and HAs agree on and have an understanding between HAs and LAs as to why they are in this position because we do not want a separation. Need a joined up approach and understanding.  WKHA is looking at the possibility of shared accommodation for single people – DW is leading on this work to try to develop a model within the social sector.  GM mentioned Snugbug in Manchester and he will share the details.  Main problem is with non stock holding authorities who are reliant on HA partners to house applicants.  BJ said that when T & CHG visited Shepway she suggested putting a message on Kent Homechoice website to advise that people need to be able to afford accommodation. JL said that TWells have written to everyone in private accommodation to advise of the need to be able to afford accommodation and will share this letter.  LC raised links to MECC – initially will have e learning module which will reinforce the issues about lifestyle choices and costs. Training will probably be offered to KHOG as an entity.  The Group agreed that there needs to be an understanding about what constitutes priority debt.  Also need to discuss the use of DHP and prevention fund to avoid homelessness as this might mitigate the position, but this will depend on individual Benefits Departments. Cannot have a blanket policy on this.  KHOG and NMSub to volunteer members to bring together all viewpoints – JL to represent KHOG with MG.  Some suggestion about HAs having their own waiting lists – might be useful for some more difficult to let properties.  There is an Agenda item on this subject for the next Homechoice Group. | **GM**  **JL** |
| **8.** | **Recent Case Law** | JS – mentioned Homelessness trumps allocations in relation to residence criteria.  JS produced a S21 flowchart produced by Nearly Legal produced this and will share with the Group.  LC noted that information in the ABC leaflet is incorrect since October 2015 as landlords cannot immediately issue S21 at the beginning of the tenancy. She also referred to a High Court Order which allows immediate eviction with virtually no notice (1 hour). JS also advised that her team are aware of this, especially since there is no right of appeal. JL noted that landlords are not always successful in obtaining this type of order.  MG asked if anyone has experience to share a copy of the Order, etc as some staff are not familiar with what these look like. | **JS**  **ALL** |
| **9.** | **Training Opportunities, Including Local Training** | MG – Dartford – Disrepair in the PR Sector, Deregulation, Enforcement, S 21 notices, illegal evictions, etc. 8 July £80 including lunch.  Prevention training Andy Gale – available at Dartford today and tomorrow.  4/5 August Minos Homeless and Reviews – At Swale.  LC asked if there is anyone interested in Albert Kennedy Trust homeless young people LGBT? Prices obtained. MG said that Metro training she attended on this subject was really useful. |  |
| **10.** | **AOB** | MG Chairs the DA Forum – women in prison who have suffered DA, and is going to Sutton Park shortly to present to them regarding homelessness, etc. Will feed back following that visit. EK have some employees who started as part of the Vision project.  DA one stop shops – interested to know which LAs attends these? Shepway is about to start – if do not attend, why not. Non attendance is thought to be mainly due to lack of resources and location.MG to send out a template establishing reasons for non attendance for members to complete and return.  Dartford held two training sessions on homelessness, allocations policy and private sector – had over 40 people attend – booked via Eventbrite (free event) – very well received and helps towards managing expectations. This has had very positive outcomes in terms of preventing inappropriate referrals, etc. MG will share her presentations.  AC has spoken to GM regarding modular and will bring back what Swale is doing to this meeting. ET will share information from Reading when received.  ET – Tenancy policy (discussed with NM Sub Group) – changes to succession. How will others deal with this? DDC take a discretionary approach.  Pay to stay – MG raised this as a potential issue.  VM – Letter from Elmlea Prison regarding a “sharing agreement” – LC advised that this has already been dealt with.  Has any work been done around LA work with UC with those in temporary accommodation?  DWP Apollo System – access? AC does not think that Benefits will allow this to be shared.  DCLG Funding for St Basils to work with LAs 2016/2017 on preventing youth homelessness and developing housing options for young people in need. KCC and ABC had this previously so others could apply but best done on a local basis.  EK – RBL emailed about talking to MBC teams but may be better speaking to this Group and will invite to attend the September meeting. LC raised that SSAFA want to attend too. LC will invite.  JL – TA subsidy is going in April 2017 - £32,000 pa for TWells next year. AC advised that they will get this back in homeless grant but no details available.  LC – Thanked the group for contributions to health and homelessness report from JPPB. AC suggested information on cost for health – EK can provide and also HHCC.  LC also thanked JL for supplying biscuits to mark GM’s last attendance at the Group. | **MG**  **MG**  **EK**  **LC** |
| **11.** | **Date of Next Meeting** | The next meeting (LA only) will be at 10am **on 15 September 2016** at MBC. |  |