Kent Housing Group

DRAFT MINUTES – Wednesday 11th May 2016

Kent County Council, Medway Room, Sessions House, Maidstone, Kent

**Attending**: Eileen Martin, Chair & Amicus Horizon Limited; Satnam Kaur, Vice Chair& TMBC; Jill Pells and Rebecca Smith, KHG; Brian Horton, SELEP; Emma Bartlett, Canterbury City Council; Keith Cane, TCHG; Deborah Upton, East Kent Housing; Sasha Harrison, Southern Housing Group; Kevin Hetherington, Kent Homechoice and Tunbridge Wells BC; Christy Holden, KCC; Deborah White, West Kent HA; Heather Stoner, HCA; Lynn Bignell, DWP; Marion Money, NLA; Peter Stringer, Golding Homes; Rebecca Walker, Swale Borough Council; Sarah Robson, Shepway DC; Sharon Williams, Ashford BC; Victoria Moffett, National Housing Federation; Wale Adetoro & Dipna Pattni, Gravesham BC; Jaqueline Wilkinson, Circle Housing Russet; Matthew Gough, Medway Council; Andrew Kefford, Sevenoaks DC;

**Apologies**: Michael Nee, Sanctuary Housing; Peter Dosad, Marie Gerald & Jacqueline Pye, Dartford BC; Chris Moore, HCA; Helen Sudbury, Golding Homes (NMSG Chair); Linda Hibbs, TMBC (KPSHG Chair); Bob Heapy & Jo Ellis, TCHG; Lesley Clay, JPPB; John Littlemore, Maidstone BC & JPPB Chair; Ashley Hook, MHS Homes; Malti Vershney, KCC Public Health; Richard Longman, TGSE; Bob Porter, Thanet DC; Pat Smith, Sevenoaks DC; Vicky Hodson, Kent Homechoice; Adrian Maunders, ERHA; Andrew Bircher, MHS Homes; Nick Fenton, KDG; Melanie Anthony, KCC;

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| **ITEM** | **NOTES** | **ACTION** |
| **Introductions & Apologies** | Introductions and apologies noted. |  |
| **Minutes & Matters Arising** | Minutes agreed as accurate. Matters arising: Page 6 – Coastal Communities Fund, BH advised that this is being progressed and BH will provide feedback shortly on this progress.Page 9 – SK advised that the Syrian Refugee programme is going well, there is good progress in Ashford and Dover are due to come on board soon. SK has suggested to Chris Grosskopf about another Kent wide meeting to discuss progress and good practice.Page 10 – all to note that agenda items to be suggested to EM, SK and RS. BH suggested that a specific item on Starter Homes would be useful going forward and this is noted by HS. | ***BH and BP to note******RS and EM to note*** |
| **KHG Sub Group Update** | Not all sub group leads were able to attend today. EM advised that on Friday 13th May there is a meeting about Affordability v’s Statutory Duty with Neighbourhood Management colleagues, there are a few items that require decisions and will feedback as there may be some work streams that come from this meeting. This is as a result of the Future of Housing Briefing.RS provided the group with an update from the Kent Engagement Group. RS advised that there was a presentation from a charity who provide training and opportunities for those with a history in construction. There have also been further discussions about the KEG Good Practice DVD, once this is completed it will be shared with colleagues. The group are also working on a third tenant training programme with the aim to have this set up by September.JP advised that KHOG met on the 3rd March, this was a full meeting. There was an update from Kent Savers which included the Governance Programme to modernise and improve Credit Unions. Kent Savers are due to have an upgraded IT system and it has been suggested he should inform KHG once all up and running. Vicky Hines from the National Housing Advise Service also attended the meeting, to advice of the services available and how to spread this news about referrals to this service across the providers in Kent. This is a free service. Medway Council also updated the group on the impacts of UC and another around Leaving Care. The group are also looking to formulate information for those who are leaving the servicesKH advised that all changes related to Data Protection and Kent Homechoice have all been implemented and this has gone well. The next project is pre-assessment and the on line assessment form and the group have secured £28,000 towards this work. There is also a small project group working with the Private Sector Housing Group to ensure appropriate links between Health and Housing. JW questioned about how the Data Protection changes to Kent Homechoice have now prevented Circle Housing from short listing applicants from the list that his held by TMBC. JW was advised to contact VH direct about this issue, EM to liaise with colleagues at AHL also about this issue as this has not been an issue for them as short listers via KHC.HSEG and Kent Private Sector Housing Group updates will be added to the KHG Information Brief Newsletter and circulated with the draft minutes. |  |
| **National Housing Federation Update** | VM provided updates from the NHF on a number of points.In autumn last year, the Federation made an agreement with the Government on how to implement its manifesto commitment to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants in a way that would work for our members. We agreed to work with the Government to deliver a Voluntary Right to Buy based on three principles – full compensation for the housing association; a commitment to one for one replacement for each of the homes sold; and the discretion not to sell a home if it would be difficult to replace, in which case the discount would be portable to another property. The decision over which homes not to sell would be down to the housing association, as would the decision over where to replace the homes and with which tenure, though we are encouraging members to begin conversations about replacements with their local authority partners.To develop the policy, DCLG have set up a sounding board of housing associations that broadly reflects the Federation’s membership. The sounding board makes recommendations to the Secretary of State, who has the final say over how the policy will be implemented. Guidance outlining the final policy will be made available in the summer to allow the Secretary of State time to make the decisions once the Housing and Planning Bill has passed and our members will be provided with this guidance within plenty of time prior to the go live date. The sounding board is supported by two working groups – one on one for one replacement and one on the portable discount – to reflect the additional thinking required to ensure these policies work.Voluntary RTB Pilots and Deal:VM advised that there is an agreement between the Government and NHF with regards to the RTB. The decision about which properties will not be sold is down to individual housing associations, as is where and what type of housing will be used to replace sold units.The pilots have talked about a significant latent demand; it’s not just those whose have been advised initially about the option to buy, demand has increased over time. With regards to the pilots there are no direct sales, these are about analysing the process and understanding how it works for all partners, sales are not permitted until the Housing and Planning Bill is legislated. There is still work taking place on the portability of the RTB scheme. This is about ensuring that all partners are engaged in the process around portability, for issues such as housing in rural areas.NHF are advising members to have discussions internally about what homes would not be put up for sale and also about engaging with partners about replacements for properties when they are sold. There are some figures available from VM with regards to the pilot findings.KH questioned about the discussions between NHF and Local Authorities or Government and Local Authorities, VM advised that NHF are having discussions with the LGA but this does fall outside of the NHF remit. EM advised that there are some articles about the funding for this new RTB scheme, until the Housing and Planning Bill is confirmed there won’t be a final decision. SW questioned whether there is any data about how much replacement dwellings are likely to cost, VM advised that this is not obtainable from the pilot and will perhaps come from Government direct.Rural and Disabled/Adapted properties are two of the likely exemptions for Amicus Horizon Limited with regards to the RTB, advised by EM. DW commented about how useful the outcomes from the pilots are likely to be to make decisions about the replacement and exemptions, for areas such as Sevenoaks replacement dwellings will be difficult. VM advised that this is a voluntary deal and there will be opportunities for review of the scheme to ensure that it works for all involved. The advice that the NHF is giving to members about exemptions is to utilise the independence to determine what they each perceive to be an exempted property, it was noted that those differences in interpretations about what makes a property rural or adapted could cause issues for replacement.Supported Housing Update:NHF have set up a task and finish group to look at a future model for Supported Housing. The group have now a set of principles that will be circulated amongst members and key partners for feedback. The consultation will be sent out next week via RS and all feedback appreciated. There are engagement events to be set up for members and key partners, VM to share this via RS to enable members to attend. There is also a public campaign with regards to the importance of supported housing. NHF are talking to DWP, DOH and DCLG about this issue and how to ensure that supported housing development is not impacted negatively by the Central Government announcements.CH advised that advised that there is feedback from colleagues that development of Extra Care Housing will stall or be stopped due to the announcements around rent reductions and this is on the radar of senior colleagues, such as Paul Carter, Leader of KCC.Starter Homes:VM advised that the NHF are working on a Starter Homes consultation, a draft response is being drafted with members. There are a number of elements to this consultation response and NHF are happy to have comments and feedback on this consultation and VM to share the final response once ready. HS advised that there have been some recent amendments to starter homes and rural exemption sites. VM to feedback on the issue of starter homes and local connection policies.VM happy to take any questions outside of the meeting Victoria.Moffett@housing.org.uk | ***VM to share the details of who is part of the task and finish group*** |
| **HCA Update** | HS advised that the issues with the Housing and Planning Bill are frustrating for HCA colleagues too as they cannot move forward on all work streams.The HCA has a new interim CEX in place through the current period of change. The HCA review that has recently taken place, including the role of the HCA is not available for sharing currently.15-18 Programme, there are still CME bids for nil grant programmes, you cannot bid for affordable homeownership schemes, and bidding for this is through the new programme and is open to October. One change is the welcome of bids from organisations who have not previously received funding from the HCA, all details are on the HCA website.Starter Homes – the programme currently is the Starter Homes Unlocking The Land Fund launched on the 16th March, to support LA to find suitable land for starter homes developments. The HCA is working with LA’s in Kent and Essex and encouraging them to put in EOI, the deadline for EOI is 13th May. The fund gives a number of funding and assistance opportunities, this can be support and expertise, acquisition of private sites for example. The assessment of bids will commence from week commencing 18th May. Within the Kent and Essex Team there has been work on SH pilots, working with those who have put in EOI bids, to establish if they can bring forward stalled sights using starter homes. If successful these pilots can be rolled out.Infrastructure Fund is being revamped currently.The HCA still have land that is assembling and disposing of alongside the work streams presented by HS. | ***HS to share update via RS***  |
| **KMHS/SELEP Update** | KMHS Refresh Update:The work on the refresh of the KMHS remains paused whilst there are still unknowns following Government announcements. KHG EXB will talk later today about the progress of the refresh and the plans to take this forward. BH and RS were due to meet with Ross Gill of KCC ahead of the meeting today but this has too been delayed, this was to provide a position about other issues such as the Devolution Deal for Kent. BH would like to have a message to share about the KMHS going forward when Housing is next with the Joint Kent Chief Executives. KH commented that a message to Joint Kent Chiefs is the concern of housing the large numbers of applicants who are on housing waiting lists in Kent and Medway who require rented accommodation, when funding available is limited. BH commented that it is a positive message that Joint Chief Executives want to have feedback about housing issues across Kent and Medway. EM advised that at the recent meeting of JCEX that EM and SK there were some colleagues who were more aware than others of the true impacts for housing. Tracey Kerly and Madeline Homer are both now representative at the JCEX meetings and have a housing background and knowledge to help with the messages that need to be shared with other CEX colleagues.MM commented that there is now a huge gap between affordability and housing need and this will grow, affordable housing now encapsulates a huge variety of people across a number of situations. Do we need to consider what Affordable Housing actually means across the Housing Sector, sector image and the terms used?SELEP Feedback:There is now a permanent Chair and Director, Chris Brodie, very experienced colleague and he was elected by the SELEP Board unanimously. There is continued work with Natalie Elphicke and the Housing Business Ready Programme, with reporting due back to the board in July, with two Kent authorities part of this work to date. SW advised that Ashford BC have found the process very useful. There is also dialogue with the HIFI about utilities research and discussion paper (how to get better value and processes for utilities and new developments), meeting with senior DCLG colleagues about this piece of work. BH advised that the papers from SELEP are available on their website, with weekly updates that you can subscribe to. RS to include the website in the minutes. <http://www.southeastlep.com/>BH spoke on behalf of Nick Fenton, who wanted to speak about the refresh of the Growth and Infrastructure Framework, the infrastructure ask and the cost of growth. NF wanted to encourage Housing colleagues to be part of this work and to engage to ensure the best possible outcomes. Katie Stewart will be invited to attend and update KHG colleagues about this work.  |  |
| **DWP Update** | LB updated the group on behalf of DWP. LB is the Operational Manager covering Maidstone Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells Job Centres in Kent..All offices in Kent have now rolled out UC Live for single non householders. The roll out for Full Service UC is February/March 2017 and this will start with Swale and Maidstone, this will be a full digital service. The UC full service is live in Croydon and Sutton, feedback is positive; this is still a test and learn process so this is an evolving service. There is a lot of work to up skill claimants to utilise the digital service. DWP are happy to work with partners to ensure that all claimants are able to use the system to apply, view and update their claims.2905 UC live claims for Kent at January 2016, this is a total figure. As at December 86 local authority claims for personal budgeting support UC went live. There are no figures about advanced payments or alternative payment methods. Work Allowance 366 claimants identified in Kent, they were all contacted and the take up of additional support from these claimants has been very low. The areas where demand was high were Sittingbourne, Sheerness, Maidstone, Gravesend and Ashford.Dave Ashdown, has now moved the UC Service Centre in Canterbury which covers a number of areas. Sarah Kennett is the new District Manager for Kent and is based in Ashford.Unaware currently of any households across Kent and Medway who have been evicted due to UC. LB happy to take back any questions or queries is members have them, RS to share contact details for LB. lynn.bignell@dwp.gsi.gov.ukSW questioned why there has been little demand up regarding personal budgeting support? LB advised that demand may increase once UC goes fully live for all claimants; this support is available without a deadline for asking for this support. SW advised that it is useful to reinforce the messages about the support available with localised partners so that claimants are aware of where to go should they experience difficulty with using the new system. Benefit Cap – latest figures about claimants effected will be shared/published later this week. DWP are offering interventions for those affected by benefit caps, and over the summer there will be more correspondence about the potential effects going forward. If colleagues have vulnerable clients who may need assistance but are not asking for it to contact DWP to ensure joint working. The Job Centre in Maidstone will close early next year and will move to the Maidstone Gateway and all services will be provided from this venue.DP advised that the Action Plan for the Fuel Poverty Strategy requires some contact or information from DWP to be part of the partnership that will work and deliver the plan outcomes. DP to email LB and this request will be shared with the appropriate colleagues at DWP.The Personal Budgeting Support is there for UC claimants and was part of original funding negotiations for this service but there will need to be provisions for those who will make the transition who will require support. The PBS is not contracted out to supply this support or does not employ anyone direct to provide this service. MM shared with LB of an example about some of the barriers to claimants who may require support.EM suggested that barriers or feedback from across Kent could be a potential work stream for the Kent Welfare Reform Task and Finish Group. |  |
| **KCC Accommodation Strategy**  | CH advised that the message and intended outcomes with regards to ‘Own Bed is Best’ continues, working with hospitals and challenging decisions about placements into Care Homes and short term placements once they leave hospital. If once home there can be an assessment to understand if a care home placement is required. In the next few weeks CH going back to Corporate Board (members and directors) with an update on the Accommodation Strategy, with a focus on OP, the issues about why sites are stalled for example. This is a difficult balance as there is no decrease in demand/activity from developers to build OP accommodation and planning applications continue to come forward. KCC continue to look at opportunities regarding re modelling where appropriate.Work continues with NHS Colleagues, SKC there is a strong interest from Shepway and Dover Health, supporting the KCC Accommodation Strategy outcomes. Working in North Kent and the Estates Strategy for land to bring forward. Internally in KCC there are discussions about finance models nd the options to get the delivery on the strategy and any joint commissioning opportunities.For LD there is continued work on Your Home Your Life project, with projections about future housing need for this client group. For MH there are forecasted numbers that will be shared internally at KCC before sharing with districts and other partners, the numbers are not huge but significant in terms of housing stock numbers. Physical Disability numbers should be available over the summer period, the future is about wheelchair adaptable housing and is now the ask from KCC. With regards to Autism, the numbers are low yet very important for this client groups and to establish the needs assessment for this client group.  |  |
| **Commissioning Body** | MA was not at the meeting. CH was able to unable to update on her behalf.CH did advise that the Supporting Independence Service, there is consideration to bring this together with the Housing Related Support Service. This will need to be co-produced and is in the very early stages of discussion. Further information will come forward in due course. RS to ask MA to provide an update for the KHG Membership.  | ***RS & MA to note*** |
| **Joint Kent Chief Executive Away Day** | EM asked members what the key issues are that they would like Housing representatives to raise at the Joint Kent Chiefs Away Day that is taking place in June. There will be a scoping meeting ahead of this Away Day in June. SW commented on the affordability issue and the links to Institutional Investment and what models should be consider this in more detail. BH advised that there is some work on this locally, Bob Porter has commenced discussions on this but was unable to attend today to feedback.  | ***Please send through any thoughts to RS & EM by Wednesday 8th June*** |
| **KHG Events 2016** | KHG Seminar 2016:Feedback from KHG Seminar 2016. There was feedback this year via Survey Monkey, only 32% feedback response although all very positive. The overall feedback will be shared via RS for inclusion with the minutes.SW commented that the seminar wasn’t as well attended as previous years; EM advised that timing and the political landscape potentially had an impact on numbers. BH commented that the Brighton CIH Conference was also low in attendance numbers; this took place quite close to the KHG event. SR commented that Shepway staff enjoyed the opportunity to attend operational workshops that were appropriate to their role. Excellence Awards:The information about the KHG Excellence Awards is available on the KHG Website (insert link) – there are eight categories to nominate for and the deadline for nominations is 12 Noon on Monday 6th June 2016. If your organisation is able to sponsor the event please contact Jill Pells, the actual event is taking place at Oakwood House on 20th July.KHG Website:RS advised that the website is work in progress, RS is due to receive a link to the development site in the next few days and will continue to feedback progress to members.Pat SmithEM advised that Pat Smith, Sevenoaks DC is due to retire at the end of May 2016 and Sarah Robson, Shepway DC was nominated and accepted to replace Pat on the KHG EXB. Thanks and best wishes are noted to Pat Smith for her hard work and contributions to Kent Housing Group. | ***RS to note*** |
| **Any Other Business** | EB advised that she is working on an Impact Review for CCC, the impact of the three Universities, the Economy, Education and Physical impacts (physical impact includes Housing), this is a partnership impact assessment and results and outcomes can be shared when completed. There is a stakeholder conference in mid- June to present evidence, the final document will be drafted and may be an agenda item for September KHG.DP thanked KHG for allowing the opportunity to present the Fuel Poverty Strategy at the KHG Seminar. The consultation feedback is being collated and there will be a report on this with an Action Plan to share with KHG and other colleagues. Districts and Boroughs may need to go through formal adoption procedures for this strategy. Any documentation and sharing of information to go via RS for dissemination to all KHG colleagues.MM advised that the NLA are also waiting on the Housing and Planning Bill, the policy team for NLA are not convinced whether the Bill will go through and will share any feedback.SW advised that Ashford BC are about to embark on a review of their Asset Management Strategy and would like to share any good practice or examples of an Asset Management Strategy to please contact SW [sharon.williams@ashford.gov.uk]. BH commented that it may be useful to reconvene the Asset Management sub group for KHG going forward or potentially a focused half day workshop session. PS advised that Golding can share some information on this, last week Golding Homes won an award on their Housing Repairs and Maintenance service and will be running workshops on good practice. PS to share more details when available. SW advised that Ashford BC would be happy to host an initial session with Golding Homes to provide an opening presentation.RS advised that JPPB are supporting the Dementia Action Alliance Awards for the sum of £1000 and would KHG like to help support this event or sponsor an award on the day. It was agreed that KHG would do this and KHG EXB would discuss the sum. It was also agreed that where possible KHG members would share with Lesley Clay examples of good practice around Dementia and what housing services are offering to residents. | ***RS and EM to note******DP and RS to note*** ***ALL******PS and SW to note******RS to liaise with Lesley Clay*** |

***Thanks noted to Kent County Council for hosting and provision of refreshments***