**KENT HOUSING GROUP WORKSHOP – 6 OCTOBER 2017**

**HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE THE UNDER 35s?**

**John Littlemore, Chair of the Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing** chaired the workshop with the aim of considering the next steps to try to arrive at a solution(s) to address the consequences of changes to entitlements for this cohort.

Presentations from **Professor Ian Cole, Professor of Housing Studies, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research Sheffield Hallam University** and **Matthew Eddy, Business Project Manager, mhs homes** are attached , along with a presentation from **Town & Country Housing Group** illustrating their proposals to address this problem.

**General discussion**

Discussions featured:

* research on capital and revenue subsidy –Benefits to Bricks (Institute of Public Policies report)
* the need to lobby
* security of tenure in the UK compared with other European neighbours

 Germany, for example do not have tenancies which are time limited, which may be suitable for institutional investors, such as Unions. There was an acknowledgement that this is not for private sector landlords who are constrained by the terms of their mortgages.

On a cautionary note it was observed that developments of specifically designed shared accommodation for those who do not have a choice due to the rate of local housing allowance, could leave a legacy of smaller space accommodation that people do not want to live in, due to the fluidity of households. It was suggested that research has shown that most private rented sector tenancies have a life of approximately 4.1 years with the majority of tenants leaving of their own volition and are not evicted. The fundamental problem is that of possible arrears from the housing allowance from Universal Credit and a reluctance from landlords to re-let to those on benefits. There were also concerns about the need for housing management with regard to shared housing for the under 35s.

With regard to supported housing it was claimed that there is a possibility that up to 85% of this type of accommodation may close as a result of the local housing allowance (LHA) cap. In Kent KCC is re-commissioning supported accommodation services next year but unfortunately, there has been no announcement from the Government as yet concerning LHA rates for supported accommodation.

Chartered Surveyors Chaney were understood to be looking to develop a portfolio of accommodation for young people but the new rent regime has rendered this impossible. There was consensus of opinion that the Government’s proposed £2 Billion for social housing, although welcome, is not enough to address the challenges in this sector.

Unintended consequences and non housing solutions discussed. The priority is to help people to come off benefits. It may also be useful to look at a flexibility within allocations policies which do not currently allow friends to register as part of a household – has to be family.

**Mhs pilot**

The mhs homes pilot accommodation is for individual fixed term ASTs and the accommodation will be in flats. It is accepted that the rent loss on a property will be in the region of 6 months, whilst suitable candidates for flat sharing are ‘matched’. There is no mediation or support element in the mhs scheme, eg help with finding work. The mhs matching process is an office interview, like an assessment centre rather than static interviews – mhs can make 5% direct nominations.

The mhs project was worked up in conjunction with the local authority; it suits both parties and meets mhs’s charitable objectives. Many HAs are no longer housing this cohort because of the changes. The intention is to release more units of accommodation for sharing over time but they will be dispersed rather than in one block.

**T&CHG**

T&CHG is looking at developing schemes and have been in conversation with neighbours of intended units of accommodation, and are being selective in locating proposed units. There is an issue with Council tax although apparently not in the Medway area where mhs homes operate. T&CHG does not envisage putting this into the rent element. Council tax is the responsibility of the landlord (VOA advice). There could be additional costs related to such things as smoke detectors.

**Next Steps:**

T&CHG is using houses not flats for their schemes - two in Tunbridge Wells and one in Wealden. There are issues around fire regulations but they are working with LAs to resolve these. This is a pilot so they are not necessarily taking those with the highest priority from the housing register. The T&CHG view is that they have to try to do something to address this problem. Rent is about £77 for a two person household. Some tenants are unaware that they may be unable to afford to rent accommodation due to the welfare changes. Porchlight recently purchased three properties and are putting in support which is currently working well. Mike Barrett (CE) will share the six month review with KHG in January 2018.

There are nine bedsits (Habitat for Humanity) in Tunbridge Wells which should be ready early next year. Jane Lang from TWBC will share feedback with KHG in 6 months time.

It was noted that there is a “time bomb” with accommodation needed for care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children who will be reaching the age to move on from KCC care. KCC is in discussion with LHAs regarding the need for accommodation.

It was noted that the Move On Toolkit has been refreshed and is on the KHG/ JPPB website. It is a useful information guide and training tool for anyone moving out of supported accommodation or looking for rented accommodation. [Move on Toolkit](http://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/protocols/moving-on-or-moving-in/)

**Following on from this workshop, all partners are asked to share information, feedback, etc on schemes and projects they are involved in for the under 35s with KHG.**