**Kent Housing Group Sub Groups**

**Kent Housing Options Group**

KHOG continued to meet virtually each fortnight with a focus moving to discussions around the ending of temporary accommodation to those persons accommodated under the ‘Everyone In’ response, whilst trying to ensure there is no reason to the street for many individuals, and the move-on options that have proven successful. The group discussed and shared practices surrounding new rough sleepers and ‘non-priority’ individuals at risk of sleeping seek assistance, with the district housing authorities taking a pragmatic approach when deciding whether any form of temporary accommodation can be provided and many adopting an approach of verifying new rough sleepers. KHOG ceased meeting fortnightly in August and has reverted to bi-monthly meetings and shift away from the recent focus on the ‘Everyone In’ response. This was due to advice from the MHCLG HAST that authorities were no longer required on the ‘Everyone In’ response and many Local Authorities had moved on large numbers of those accommodated under the response into more settled accommodation.

Support and guidance has continued to be provided by the HAST advisors from the MHCLG who provide an update at each meeting on information from central government and updated on both revenue and capital funding. The most recent funding options discussed is the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, capital and revenue funding to support the Covid-19 rough sleeper response.

Updates are regularly provided by the lead KCC commissioners for domestic abuse, young person’s services, adult homelessness services and substance misuse services. District housing authorities have also been sharing any operational updates, including discussions of any ‘return to office’ planning.

Work continues on the Young Persons Homelessness Protocol, with volunteers from both KCC and district housing authorities updating to include the feedback and suggestions from Kim Davis, MCHLG specialist young person’s advisor.

Various data and information requests have been asked of the group from both KCC Public Health, the Kent and Medway CCG and via the KRF CIC.

The group continues to share any updated on any changes in relevant legislation and housing case law.

**Kent Tenancy Management Sub Group**

This group have met four times virtually since the Covid-19 pandemic commenced, having just met on the 16th September 2020. This meeting was a focus upon feedback from the Best Practice Session in July 2020 which was very well attended and also a focus on the changes to the legal and court proceedings. Attendance generally within the Sub Group remains steady and consistent which is very positive and the networking has proved very beneficial for joining up approaches and adapting to new customer experiences. Future agenda items will continue to be about keeping up to date with legal and court updates, the development of a KHG Guide to Virtual Lettings and supporting the work of the Financial Hardship working group, a work stream from the Kent Resilience Forum.

**Kent Private Sector Housing Group**

The KPSHG are due to meet virtually through video conferencing in mid-September (Monday 14th September 2020). June’s meeting was cancelled but written updates were given to group members. We are asking members to provide verbal updates at the meeting in September rather than the usual written ones in order to make the meeting more interactive.

Kerry Petts – Chair of the KPSHG has been contacted by John Littlemore who is participating in a Covid recovery panel. He has been alerted to the issues surrounding getting DFG monies spent for this year and the hold up with OT assessments due to OTs doing urgent priority work only, through the lockdown. Together with JMG Chairs we are trying to negotiate a way forward to get the DFG assessment referrals coming back through to help our residents and hopefully alleviate pressure on social care from the other end. Any assistance or ideas from John or the panel would be gratefully received.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service have written to all Kent PSH managers advising that they are withdrawing from our Kent fire safety enforcement protocol from 1st July. The Chair of the Kent Housing Technical Group, Richard Hopkins, has sent a letter on behalf of all LA PSH teams stating our disappointment and pointing out that by withdrawing from the protocol there now is no agreed protocol which may have an impact on cases in individual areas. If it is not clear as to who should be taking enforcement lead in certain types of residential properties this may result in debate and difficulties in the future. We currently await KFRS’ response and hope that they will agree to negotiate a new protocol going forward. A second response reaffirming KFRS’s position was received in late July and most Local authorities have now sent another letter back to KFRS stating that they disagree and that they are now referring the matter to their individual chief executives. Template letter was kindly provided by Richard Hopkins, Thanet Council PSH Manager.

RISE 2020 event has been cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. A virtual event will take place instead and housing representatives have been asked to contribute anything they can to inform customers of how we have been managing in covid 19. Next year’s event is to be discussed in a virtual meeting on 16th September.

Members have been taking advantage of the many different free webinars provided by Landlord Associations, Solicitors’ firms, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and others. They have served to keep us informed and allow us to continue gaining valuable CPD hours.

Most PSH teams are now getting back to doing some housing inspections but attempting to resolve housing complaints through virtual means where possible. New working procedures and risk assessments have been written and procurement of PPE to protect staff and customers.

**Housing, Health and Social Care Sub Group**

We cancelled our June meeting in light of Covid-19 and due to the increased demand this pandemic put on our membership colleagues to provide additional front line support. Our next meeting is scheduled for September and will be held virtually.

During this time we have been; ensuring Public Health messaging have been reaching colleagues, delivering on our joint campaign work, exploring training opportunities, conducted a mid-point review of our action plan and ascertained members delivery priorities from that action plan going forward. We have also written KHG members an interactive e-newsletter with useful information for their customer/clients in the aim of offering them some support during this uncertain time.

**Housing Strategy and Enabling Group**

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Group met in early June and then more recently in September with a presentation from Lucy Breeze at KCC to introduce the Kent Low Emissions Strategy and the Kent Environment Strategy. The group also had a verbal update from Homes England and a presentation from Medway Council about a study undertaken with regards to small sites and delivery of new homes. The Action Plan for the group remains in development and will be agreed by the end of the year, with a view to prioritise Covid-19 response work. The next step for the Rural Housing Protocol is to launch it virtually. The group will meet again in November 2020.

**Kent Engagement Group**

Kent Engagement Group met virtually on 1st June to discuss the challenges of delivering resident involvement and community development services through lockdown, sharing best practice on the new normal of zoom conferences, online workshops, and managing staff remotely. It’s clear that there has been a huge change in the nature of what our members do, if they are even doing it at all at the moment, so the meeting provided a much needed support platform to reassure members they aren’t alone. A lot has already changed since June, so we’ll meet again and fingers crossed we’ll be out engaging with communities again soon.

The engagement group welcomes back it’s Chair Helen Critcher, who has returned from maternity leave.

**Kent Events Group**

We’re continuing to work on our events programme for 20/21 and have some great, free to members, virtual workshops coming up over the next few months. The sessions include a legal update from Capsticks, Housing Ombudsman training around ASB and repairs, as well as PREVENT and MECC.

For future workshops we’re looking at Q & A sessions as well as to introduce new protocols.

The group are in full swing planning the KHG Excellence Awards for Spring 2021. It will be a smaller event but we know it will be just as successful as previous years and we want to include as many people as possible, virtually and in person. We’ve reviewed the categories - look out over the next few weeks to see how you can nominate an organisation, person or group.

Please contact Rebecca Smith or Kerry Newbury if you’ve:

• Missed any information on the workshops we’re holding and would like to attend,

• Anything you’d like to see included in our next newsletter,

• Any ideas for events or training you’ve seen or would like to see,

• Would like to know more about the events group.

**Kent HomeChoice**

A KHC Operational Meeting was held at the end of July 2020.

We are still awaiting the return of a number of signed Partnership Agreements, **until these are returned, we are unable to extend the contract with Locata.**

The Project Board approved the development of an enhanced Social Lettings Agency Module – a specification has now been drafted and has been sent to some LAs for feedback.

An annual data protection review will be added to the Locata system for all staff system users following a data breach.

A project to improve matching of accessible properties to applicants is progressing well.

The ability to add virtual property tours and improved property images to Locata and the public site is almost complete.

**Corporate Parent and Children’s Commissioning**

Emergency Bed Scheme: the Young People’s Supported Accommodation and Floating Support (YPSAFS) service has launched an emergency bed scheme. The service offers an emergency placement for 1 night (or 3 nights following an assessment) in an emergency to those aged 16-25 within our supported accommodation units. Each provision includes: A room with a bed, bedding or sleeping bag, pillow, overnight toiletries, wash facilities, a fridge/microwave and a safe. Referrals should only be made after 4pm by Kent County Council staff to prevent out of hours issues; normal placement processes apply before this time. Once the young person arrives at the service, an induction will be completed. The facilities must be vacated by the next working day at around 10am to allow for room cleaning to occur. Exceptions may be considered in some circumstances, although this will be on a case by case basis, and in agreement with the provider of the service.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: Three reception Centres currently in operation: Millbank (Ashford), Appledore (Cranbrook), and Oakwood (Maidstone). Appledore and Oakwood are temporary arrangements with the latter being used as quarantine for new arrivals (14 days). There were 71 new arrivals in July and 97 in August. To date, via the Governments National Transfer Scheme, there have been 153 UASC moved on to other local authorities outside Kent, there are a further 70 offers pending.

Move-on: This continues to be challenging for all supported accommodation services with many reporting capacity issues to meet demand. For example, in Shared there are currently 883 YP placed with 150 of these being 21-years and over. A further 100 YP with become 21-years in the next six-months.

18+ Private Rental Sector Referral Scheme: To date we have received 80 referrals for young adults and have had 10 young adults move into private rented accommodation.

**Additional Countywide Group Updates**

**Kent and Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership**

The Kent and Medway Warm Homes Scheme is now back to completing installations following enhanced safety and social distancing procedures.

KMSEP partners are looking at future options for providing an energy efficiency home offer for residents, following on from the KMSEP Retrofitting Framework which officially ended in October 2014. We are currently working to extend our existing contracts for heating and insulation works to 2021 due to COVID19 to ensure there is no gap in our offering.

Solar Together Kent, a collective solar PV buying scheme, was set to launch in March but had been postponed. Nine Kent districts and Medway council signed up to participate. The scheme hopes to encourage the uptake of solar panels for residents and small businesses across Kent. Registration for the scheme is now open until the reverse auction takes place on the 6th October 2020. There will now also be an option for homes with existing solar panel installations to install battery storage systems through the scheme.

The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy is now available [here.](https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/environment-waste-and-planning-policies/environmental-policies/kent-and-medway-energy-and-low-emissions-strategy)

The next meeting of the Project Board will be taking place in September

**Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership**

Due to current situation with COIVD-19, the delivery of many schemes have slowed down but are operational again. The Partnership is continuing to deliver the following:

Contract and promotional delivery with SSE on the Warm Homes Funding. KEEP was successful in obtaining Warm Homes Funding to develop off gas connections and first time central heating from the Category 1 (Urban) and Category 3 (Park Homes) funding. 7 Kent Local Authorities supported the funding applications.

Off Gas Scheme with SGN – currently collecting referrals for future processing once operational. Funding from SGN is in place until 31 December 2020 for first time gas connections and first time central heating installation. SGN are currently seeking OFGEM extension to the scheme.

KEEP members have been working with KMSEP task and finish group to look at future of the KMSEP Framework as the current Warm Homes Framework ends in September 2020. At present KEEP is working to secure extensions to existing contracts due to COIVD-19. This is to ensure that heating and other energy efficiency measures are in place for vulnerable residents during Winter 2020/21.

Still delivering Collective switching schemes. Saving money through energy bills is now more important than ever because of the financial strain many people will have encountered as a result of COVID 19, and increased levels of home working.

New scheme ‘Solar Together’ has been postponed until August 2020. This scheme is supported by a number of Kent LA’s with KCC overseeing the contract.

KEEP officers are continuing to work on the Climate Emergency agenda. Partners continue to deliver actions outlined in the Kent Fuel Poverty Strategy, and continue to progress partnership working across organisations. Some local authorities are starting to identify Health partners and are attending CCG meetings at GP level to input increasing awareness about BCF grants and other grants.