**KPSHG Meeting Notes 7th December 2020, Teams Call**

**Attending –** Kerry Petts, Chair and Folkestone & Hythe DC; Julian Watts, Ashford BC; Hazel Skinner & Jason Wheble, TMBC; Rachel Evans, Dartford BC; James Cox, TWBC; Marion Money, NRLA; Peter Littlewood iHowz; Dipna Pattni, Gravesham BC; Tim Lovell, Canterbury City Council; Robin Kennedy, Dover DC; Rebecca Smith, KHG

**Apologies** – Francesca Baylis, Kent County Council; Nigel Bucklow, Maidstone BC; Donna Crozier, Peabody; Jane Miller, Kent County Council

Introductions and Apologies noted

**NRLA Update -**

MM advised that the merger has gone well despite lockdown, 2,500 calls to the helpline each week across the country which indicates the level of support the joint organisation can give to the membership. Head Office team have been working on the Rent Reform Bill with dialogue with Ministers and Civil Servants. The stay on court and Bailiff actions has caused some problems for landlords and members, tenants who can pay but are not paying due to landlords not able to evict, which is troublesome for smaller landlords.

The LHA of UC will not be kept up to date with inflation or market rents, going to the 30th percentile has made housing more affordable but the freeze in April 2021 will have an impact on affordability. Continuing to share the message back to Government about those under 35 who are only eligible for shared room rate support with rent, should this group of people have to give up current

**iHowz Update -**

PL echoed the same as MM, let’s are going well and landlords and tenants working together, a small minority having trouble with the small minority who are not paying due to knowing they can’t be evicted. This may impact on the number of landlords in the sector. iHowz do a regular update to members which has moved from monthly to weekly, the most recent has 20 items as part of it.

PL asked about the requirement for Electrical Assessments and if certificates are being sent to the local authority, is this happening? KP advised that not a lot have come through, HS advised that receiving them from one particular agent, this is only for the works if there has been a failure on an initial assessment.

**KMSEP Update** –

FB unable to attend the meeting, there is an update within the Countywide Update shared by RS with the meeting agenda. DP advised that there is a Project Board meeting this week, the framework will end at the end of March 2021, with a view that trying to pursue Fusion 21, have had a meeting with them last week, trying to keep consistency in delivering projects.

**KEEP Update** –

DP advised that delivery for OFFGAS and Warm Homes Fund has been delayed due to lockdown. There has been a takeover of the provider SSE so only realising processes in the last month. Still finding problems with insurance and having a whole service approach to heating and insulation, now liaising directly with the provider to get these issues ironed out. There are many vulnerable people on the list who require heating and support, seeking advice from Peter Dosad (Head of Housing at Dartford BC) and others as only have until 31st March 2021 to have the gas connection installed or this impacts on further elements of the work. It is difficult with two districts working on the two pots of funding.

Other District Councils are now identifying properties through EPC data so there are a number of properties to pursue, decision to make about whether to go through SSE or direct to the provider on the framework.

First solar auction in October, waiting to hear results of this. Also still working on the Climate Change agenda, identifying projects and funding in individual local authorities.

KP thanked DP and her colleague Sandra for all the hard work on these two funding projects.

**HIA Update –**

DC unable to attend the meeting and there was no representation from Swale BC for a Staying Put update. DC and SH to share any updates by email via RS.

**Handover of Chair –**

KP advised that she has sat for two years in the role of Chair, from the New Year a new Chair will be required, KP put the offer to the group about the role. KP did advise that Julian from Ashford has put himself forward for the role, which is a good opportunity to network and to get invited to other panels and Boards, including meetings via Foundations, will be putting forward for the Chair of EK JMG. This is about the strategic role of the work of the PSH Teams.

MM has been Vice Chair for a significant period of time and suggested that the group could consider a similar set up to the KHG with an alternating Chair and Vice Chair between local authorities, to enable a smooth transition and continuity.

**ACTION** - Colleagues to confirm their interest in the Vice Chair role by the March 2021 meeting of KPSHG.

**Roundtable Discussion –**

KP advised that continuing to work through enforcement work load through lockdown, working virtually or over the phone, her team is one member down currently. Offices have been closed since March 2020 with no sign to reopen imminently, have been set up for remote working straight away. KP has organised a ‘walk and talk’ meeting along the sea front as a team meeting and looking to use virtual office time through Skype to offer the opportunity for colleagues to liaise during the working day, potentially once a week to be trailed in the new year.

JW advised that similar set up to F&HDC, trying to organise a team gathering before Christmas to the team together.

RK advised that continuing with work load, following risk assessments ahead of any visits, been two members of staff down, getting one staff member in January 2021, had a 10-15% increase on complaints. A landlord pleaded guilty on a second offence, delayed due to Covid-19, Dover DC considering banning him from operating in the Dover area. RK also setting up a Christmas team gathering. Large council meeting with the Leader and CEX last week, waiting to see what funding may come through from Government for financial support.

30% down on OT recommendations so DFG spending is now low as a result. Revised their Enforcement Policy to show dealing with the electrical element and minimum Energy Efficiency regulations.

JC advised that have sent through their Housing Enforcement Policy approved last week and also housing assistance policy going to cabinet in February. Complaints have slightly increased, damp and mould cases. The SGN First Install work, a lot of people who want the support but the process is very complex to navigate. MM mentioned that an SGN representative attended a Dover Forum about two years ago and there was a seamless process and grant structure used, which enabled heating installation to be completed, is this an option for DP to consider as part of their project work? DP advised that this works for a landlord but cannot as a local authority for grant or top up funding. Under procurement rules cannot use YES Energy, and the uncertainty about the KMSEP framework was another issue.

HS advised TMBC offices are open but very limited numbers in attendance, visits where essential are being undertaken, noticed an increase in illegal evictions and harassment which may be as a result of the stay on court and bailiff action. Also undergoing a restructure within the organisation. There are twice weekly teams meetings for liaison, easily achieved as a small team. DFG referrals starting to increase but not at usual rate of spend at this time of the year.

RE thanked DP and Sandra for their KEEP work. Graham Harris, MD passed away in the summer whilst in service, a decision to not appoint another MD has been made, a third Director of Housing and Public Protection will be appointed so covers PSH and the Energy Efficiency work. One existing director has also put themselves forward for retirement. DFG spend has halted in some cases and slow referrals, introduced a few new discretionary policies and going to promote these to help spend the money. Putting together electrical regulations to go to Cabinet in January 2021. Going to the office one day per week, only open by appointment, finding an increase in HMO allegations, HMO investigation work is therefore heavy. Damp and mould cases are increasing, still inspecting when necessary. Also have weekly meetings via Teams to touch base and keep communication going. A virtual Christmas quiz has been arranged.

DP advised that offices are open but limited staff, DFG accelerated over the last six months, using discretionary funding for heating and hospital discharge side of the service.

TL advised that similar to others, only by appointment is access to the Civic Centre, have to have permission from the Director to get into the office. Lost a member of staff, will be recruiting to this post moving forward, now managing the aids and adaptations service. DFG’s running as expected/on par as per last year, not likely to spend the full budget allocation, referrals are fine but contractor side is behind. Announcement of additional money for DFG’s, any more details? KP advised that an email came via Foundations but no detail on amounts but should be paid this week (9th December 2020). Also having weekly team meetings, may instigate the idea of an open virtual office space for colleagues to liaise on.

RK advised that Brexit is impacting Dover DC, have got to employ up to 150 new staff, which may increase to 200, 30 vets, 30 Environment Health Officers for examples, this is an additional pressure for the local authority. JW advised that Ashford BC will also be taking up to 150 new staff as building a Border Control Post, dealing with food and animals coming into the country, to potentially be up and running for July 2021, currently recruiting for HR and Payroll staff.

**RISE 2021 –**

KP advised that the virtual event for 2020 went ahead this year as planned. The event for 2021 is set for 22nd June 2021, expecting it to be a live event, KP would hope that there is more time to provide support and information for a virtual event if the event switches. **ACTION** - KP to make contact with RISE colleagues to confirm this request and feedback progress.

**Additional Updates/Matters Arising/AOB**

The next meeting is 8th March 2021, at 9.30am via Microsoft Teams.

Any agenda item suggestions, speakers or training to be shared with JW and RS. – to include a round up or how to access Housing Assistance Policy documents.