**DRAFT Kent Tenancy Management Sub Group Summary Notes – 19th May 2020, via Skype**

**Attending**: Genette Pinwill, Chair & West Kent HA; Felicity Dunmall, Gravesend Churches Housing Association; Helen Sudbury, Golding Homes; Rebecca Wilcox & Anthony Crossley, Ashford Borough Council; David Eddie, Dartford BC; Terry Spillard, Optivo; Sophie Hargreaves, Clarion HG; Tom Harding Medway Council; Matt Eddy, MHS Homes; Keith Cane, TCH; Linda Smith, Kent Public Health;

**Apologies**: Georgina Tippins, Moat; Dan Prentice, Radcliff HS; Vitra Cummins, TCH

All colleagues welcomed to the meeting.

**Lettings and Voids:**

Optivo now undertaking virtual viewing, they have approximately 100 properties void in swale and outline areas, relets time currently is 34 days. Videos of the property to do the viewings are undertaken followed up with electronic paperwork, the product used is called Walk with Me, which covers all elements of the process. Housing Officers and Inspectors (with PPE) are going out to do the videoing, using all opportunities when there is a visit to a void. One issue has been condition of the properties that are void and if they are suitable for video.

Golding Homes have completed eight video viewings and using electronic sign ups and using key safes this week to minimise contact in the office by residents and staff.

GCHA are completing sign ups using DocuSign and using YouTube for their viewings. Also using a specialist cleaning company for full sanitation of the property, to include a second clean if property has to be viewed or visited more than once.

Clarion HG are not undertaking virtual viewings, properties are checked by staff and then are using key safes for independent viewings by the applicant.

MHS virtual viewings live via Teams, setting up an appointment and using this as an interactive viewing. This does rely on good signal/internet services.

Medway have decided against virtual viewings, they feel it is important for residents to see the local area and property before there is a commitment, to do this they are practicing social distancing, the tenant views alone but is let in by the Housing Officer with hand sanitiser in the property. Using DocuSign for Tenancy Agreements. Still handing keys over in a plastic bag at Medway offices but to consider a move to using key safes.

**ACTION - Colleagues to make contact with specific colleagues to follow up any ideas.**

HS questioned about MEX and inspections. GP advised that due to some landlords not carrying out inspections, many on hold, Medway potentially considering to start inspections again from 1st June, following Government guidance. There are some practical issues with regards to these inspections.

General summary that applications are being processed but inspections on hold until further notice.

**Income Protection (including UC):**

GCHA advised that arrears have decreased so in a fortunate position currently. GCHA have made contact with all tenants, spoke to them all and ascertain the full financial position and group according the impact of Covid-19. Those who have been in arrears are tenants who have history of non-payment. Those who have been genuinely impacted have remained in contact. This has been a good and successful approach as GCHA is a small organisation.

RW advised that Ashford BC spiked initially and risk was in the red, just over 5000 properties, however as more of a move to UC the numbers have reduced, although still higher than usual for this time of year. Have changed some practices due to working from home, with increased contact. As an LA have had shielding data so have been able to work with community groups, how to access food banks – all information on the main Ashford BC website for those with stock in Ashford. Now moving to recovery phase, gearing up the Welfare Intervention Team and Housing Officers to support and work with tenants. Council Tax in Ashford have also had a peak in calls.

Golding Homes experienced an initial peak in UC verifications but this has reduced and stabilised. Colleagues agreed likely to see another potential peak in July with changes to Furlough payments from employers. Not seen any news yet on the new Pre Action Protocol and the practices going forward for Court. WKHA have tailored their automation around arrears and targeting UC claimants and payment dates via texts, reminding them about payments and working this week on campaign materials about how to share the right messages, to encourage tenants to keep engagement with landlords.

GCHA are sign posting to Kent Savers Union to try and prevent tenants from going to other sources of loan which incur high interest charges.

HS asked about issuing court proceedings for Notices served before 26th March, ME advised that MHS Homes are looking to, dependent upon notification from the Courts, and taking action before the Notice expires.

RW advised that Ashford BC have high arrears cases with NOSPs served prior to March 2020, tenants who were not engaging previously and arrears are not Covid-19 related. There are current Court Orders also for consideration who again were historically non payers, aside from Covid-19. It is not yet clear about the timing of lifting this ban on Notices or Court action, and whether you can comply with a new Pre Action Protocol. RW advised that Government have to balance the risk on the PRS and the local authorities depending on the decision about the lift on Notices/Evictions, will it be one pathway for each sector?

**ACTION - GP to share details of campaign materials once back from residents who have been asked to comment.**

**Management of ASB during Covid-19:**

GP advised that no spike in ASB or DA, some expectations that this could change moving forward.

DE advised that DBC are currently underway with an injunction, Courts do seem to be open for these kind of cases. Seen a spike in ASB and will be interesting to see the impact of Stay Alert on social distancing.

RW advised that Ashford BC have done a breach of a closure and two partial closures during lockdown, putting possession proceedings together for the breach currently. Only taken action where really required. AC advised that good weather and tolerance of neighbours is reducing, haven been serving CPWN’s as a result.

Optivo not experienced spikes in DA, it has been expected, need to ensure that residents are made aware of what services are available.

RS advised that as lockdown restrictions continue to reduce this may provide more opportunities for victims of DA to come forward or to leave their homes and this could impact the numbers seen to date, there are currently voids in refuges in Kent, RS can provide contact details for KCC if required.

RW advised that lounges in schemes are closed and not planning to change this, had three recent cases with Covid-19, one Care Home and two Hospital Discharges. Hard to share the messages to some client groups. Some are social distancing in communal gardens.

**Health and Safety access / Estate and Communal services:**

Medway have had one tenancy over the 12 month limit for Gas Safety due to non-compliance of entry, have kept a detailed audit trail for this property. Some who start off by saying no in the main do allow access.

DBC advised that the Repairs Team for voids are flushing through water pipes to reduce the risk for legionaries’ disease where water has sat stagnate.

GCHA are using a traffic light system to complete remedial repairs, the contractors have their own risk assessments completed to enable this work.

GP advised that some KCC Waste Sites have started to reopen on an appointment system, with a good amount of information shared via social media. Medway noticed that it was the clearance of fly tipping that has been more of an issue due to the service on hold for the first few weeks of lockdown.

**Keeping teams engagements and supported whilst working remotely:**

WKHA have had a ‘dance off’ which has been shared across the business, with a big focus on mental wellbeing and keeping staff engaged.

SH advised that Clarion HG developed a bespoke bingo game for when on conference calls and also visual ‘bake offs’.

Ashford BC have been doing virtual quizzes and now thinking about virtual bingo for some residents to be facilitated by staff.

*What other innovation in delivery of services or working remotely have been introduced that could be shared?*

RW advised that Ashford BC prior to Covid-19 did not rely upon home working, this new way of working has demonstrated that staff can achieve a good amount of work from home. Limited numbers of staff going to return to the office currently. How do you find staff that have to travel in, and how support digital transformation and facilitate this? Huge culture change for organisations, how to manage office space and manage mental health of colleagues, how to mobilise at the right time.

ME advised not to call it a recovery plan, its more about redesign and refocus – how to work smarter.

Medway have a small minority of staff who are keen to return to the office, those who live alone for example, but to manage expectations. Have to consider the longer term and strategic solutions for home working on a more permanent basis.

*Training or information – how can KHG help facilitate this?*

**Any Other Business**

Topics or questions for a future meeting?

* Spend longer talking about sharing ideas and practice about how we work moving forward
* Viewings and allocation of properties
* Repairs diagnostics moving forward – what is good software to support this?
* How to support tenants to work with landlords in a new way, a more digital format