**Kent Housing Group Sub Groups**

**Kent Housing Options Group**

KHOG have met once since the last update was shared with KHG, having held a full membership meeting on 4th March. Colleagues from the MHCLG continue to provide updates on the national response to rough sleeping and various funding streams to support rough sleepers/former rough sleepers into long term accommodation, and wider homelessness update with national data on homelessness. Updates have been shared on changes to legislation impacting on homelessness, such as Domestic Abuse Bill.

A focus of the most recent meeting was around the rough sleeper Covid and health response to this client group, with updates on the vaccination rollout and GP provision. Through KHOG and in collaboration with health colleagues and the Kent Resilience Forum, a two-hour time slot was made available at several of the mass vaccination centres for LA’s to arrange for their accommodated rough sleepers to attend to receive the Covid vaccine.

KHOG were also made of possible funding opportunities through KCC via two different grants they receive from central government around the Covid recovery; the Contain Outbreak Management Fund and Helping Hand Fund. A small task and finish (T&F) group was established to explore ideas for a bid for this fund. A follow up call between Rebecca Smith (KHG), Ray O’Shea (Ashford BC) and I took place to discuss the initial drafting of a bid following the T&F ideas. Next step is to finalise a draft bid and share with KHOG colleagues for comments, before submitting bid to the KCC Covid-19 funding panel.

A colleague from Porchlight attended to provide a further update on the Women’s Services pilot project and seeking further representation from housing colleagues to the Women’s Services Working Group. Suggestion given to explore options with woman’s open prison, such as East Sutton Park (ESP), with the example given of the working relationship ESP has with Maidstone BC.

Updates continue to be provided by KCC commissioners around the various KCC commissioned services, including domestic abuse, young persons, and adult homelessness services. A T&F group has been establish to review the Intentionally Homeless Families protocol and work towards updating this with view to a protocol than has more focus on preventing homelessness and support families who are or would otherwise be found to be intentionally homeless.

Finally, since the previous update the Young Persons protocol was successfully launched, on 18th March, at a virtual launch event on Microsoft Teams where over 170 people attended the event. The next meeting of KHOG is 22nd April 2021, which is an LA only meeting.

**Kent Tenancy Management Sub Group**

KTMSG met last on 23 February 2021. Topics discussed include:

* Older Person Accommodation Reviews – Several partners were engaging in review of their services so we held an open discussion on approaches and themes to assist shared learning of need and approaches in Kent.
* Domestic Abuse Reciprocal ways of working – A discussion opportunity to look at ways to enhance our offer in Kent working in partnership with DAHA south east forum.
* Standing items remain for core tenancy management functions relating to income and legal services; tenancy sustainment; anti-social behaviour and lettings. This is to enable ongoing shared learning of adapted practices and reviews of new ways of working.

Meeting virtually continues to be very productive for sustain strong attendance numbers and engaged conversations. Our focus for the next meeting is returning to the Domestic Abuse ways of working and Pre Tenancy services as a topics to pick up on project work from previous years and looking at ways to re-engage our partnership approach on this theme and what has worked well.

**Kent Private Sector Housing Group**

The KPSHG met virtually in March 2021, with Julian Watts (Ashford BC) as the new Chair of the group and with verbal updates from partners including KMSEP and KEEP.

KCC colleague Palminder Sandher attended the meeting to talk with colleagues about the current approach and process for managing unauthorised encampments in the county, there was also a discussion about the LADS2 and Green Homes Grant bidding process. Standing items and updates were received from NRLA, the HIA and iHowz.

Most PSH teams are 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. The group is meeting next in early July 2021, agenda to be confirmed.

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

We are currently reviewing our action plan in light of; the new KHG Kent and Medway Housing Strategy, the Social Housing White Paper 2021 and the learning from the Covid-19 pandemic.  The new action plan will be shared in June 2021.

We have also taken this time to review our membership and are so happy to have all twelve local authorities, eleven of the sixteen Kent based registered providers, key partners within the NHS and social care sector, as well as KCHFT and Kent Fire and Rescue Service as members.  This commitment from colleagues to this conversation about housing and health provides great hope that we really can make a difference across Kent to improve the health of individuals, homes and communities.

**Housing Strategy and Enabling Group**

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Group met in February 2021 with feedback on the launch of revised KHG Rural Housing Protocol, there was a written update from Homes England as shared from the February meeting of the main KHG membership. The group is due to meet again in May and Housing 21 will be attending regarding Co-housing for Older People, with other agenda items to be confirmed.

**Kent Engagement Group**

The Kent Engagement Group have met on the 11th February and then again on the 27th April. At the February meeting there was an update from Porchlight about their Aspirations Mental Health Service, followed by a round table discussion that included how colleagues are managing the work life balance whilst restrictions remain in place and how they continue to communicate and engage with residents during the pandemic. At the April meeting there was an overview of the Hyde Foundation and their desire to work more collaboratively with other Kent colleagues for the benefit of residents, We Are Resource, a leading print and marketing company within the housing sector attended to advise colleagues of the services provided by their company, having recently worked with both WKHA and Golding Homes. GCHA updated colleagues on the outcomes and feedback on the newly commissioned service to provide support for their residents, which is available 24/7, 365 days per year. Colleagues also discussed the planning for future events with residents and the return to work in the office, how to recruit residents for newly formed panels or those under review and learning from residents through survey work. The group meets next in July 2021.

**Kent Events Group**

The KHG Events are met in early February, twice in March and on the 29th April primarily to finalise the planning of the KHG Extraordinary Awards, including agreement of the final slide deck content and running order, confirmation of the prize boxes and what will be covered within the script.

A recent Events Newsletter has confirmed what events are planned currently across a number of months in 2021, with colleagues asked to share any thoughts on additional training or information sessions that would benefit the wider membership.

The group will continue to plan for events over the course of the 2021 with focus on the Housing White Paper, if you have expertise or good practice in either area or of another please let Rebecca Smith know and a session can be developed and delivered.

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

• 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**

KHC Operational Meetings have been held in January and April 2021

The change of circumstance process which went live in December 2020 is going to be reviewed as the Operational Group feel that there are some enhancements that could be made which would further improve the process.

Although we are still waiting for a small number of Partnership Agreements to be returned, we have had approval to extend the contract that we have for the system with Locata for a further year. This will be extended again next year for a further year after which we will need to go back out to tender.

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The new version of the help with homelessness triage tool went live in early 2021.

The updated eligibility questions which ensure that the application process complies with the new legislation went live on the application form in April 20201.

Across Kent we have seen a huge increase in the number of new applications from people applying to the housing register and we currently have a backlog in the region of 5,000 applications that are waiting to be assessed.

We are continuing to develop our suite of pre tenancy training videos with assistance from the video production team at Dover and we are now looking at ways that we can integrate these with the application process.

**Additional Countywide Group Updates**

**Kent and Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership**

KMSEP partners are looking at future options for providing an energy efficiency offer for residents, following on from the KMSEP Retrofitting Framework which officially ended in October 2014. Our existing contracts have been extended until 30th September 2021, but we are now working on the new contracts to take over from these.

The referrals process for the Kent and Medway Warm Homes scheme has changed over successfully to streamline the process and allow better direction of residents. Those looking to apply will now be given contact details specific to their district to allow direction to the wide range of funding and schemes available in different areas, not just Warm Homes.

Solar Together Kent, a collective solar PV buying scheme, had around 4,000 residents register for a no-obligation quote for solar panels and/or battery storage. Nine Kent districts and Medway council signed up to participate. The scheme ran a successful information session with 290 attendees and had just under 700 residents accept their quotes. Surveys are now taking place and installations should take place before the end of June 2021.

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 June.

**Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership**

The Partnership is continuing to deliver the following through ongoing COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. We had recent KEEP meeting on preparing for the HECA returns that is due from LAs end of May. We have started drafting a report for LAs to use and customise further to their individual needs.

Current contract with SGN/WHF is continuing to deliver first time gas central heating in partnership with SGN/SSE. Warm Homes Fund for first time central heating installs has been extended beyond May 2021.

LADS 1 delivery is on its way for EWI/ASHP. The government has extended until 30 June 2021.

Off Gas Scheme with SGN – currently collecting and processing referrals for all LAs taking part. Funding from SGN has been extended until March 2021 for gas connections and heating fund until March 2022. The new FPNS has new eligibility changes from April for first time gas connections. All LAs will need to sign up to SGN individually and most have already.

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 has been extended to end of the year. This is to ensure that heating and other energy efficiency measures are in place for vulnerable residents during Winter 2021/22.

Officers are also looking at the recent development of the LADS 2 scheme. This will be delivered via the Energy Hub. There seems to be major changes in how it will be administered including an agent being procured for the delivery. Kent officers have sent their requests to the Energy Hub.

We are continuing to deliver 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 had its first auction in October and we await outcome. 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.

Local authorities have received the winter food and fuel grant to administer. Work is under way to deliver this to the vulnerable households as quickly as possible. The Partnership will also be working with KCC to help deliver this until end of March.