**KPSHG Meeting Notes 5th July 2021, Teams Call**

**Attending –** Julian Watts, Chair and Ashford BC; Amanda Martin, Dover DC & KEEP; Ashley Jackson, Thanet DC; Daniel Shaw, Sevenoaks DC; Donna Crozier, Peabody; Glyn Pritchard, Swale BC; Hazel Skinner & Jason Wheble, TMBC; Helen Miller, (new KHG Partnership Manager); Jane Miller, KCC; Marion Money, NRLA; Nigel Bucklow, Maidstone BC; Peter Littlewood, iHowz; Lloyd Rees, Medway Council; Eve Lockton-Goddard, Thanet DC; Rebecca Smith, KHG;

**Apologies** – Richard Stanford Beale, KF&RS; Kellie Pettet-Steele, KCC; James Cox & Claire Pickering, TWBC; Kerry Petts, F&HDC; Francesca Bayliss, KCC; Rachel Evans, Dartford BC;

JW thanks MM and Eve for both presenting at the meeting today.

**LADS & Eco Funding –** Government announced next round of funding Sustainable Warmth, two funding streams together LADS 3 and Home Upgrade Grants. All Kent authorities given an allocation for LADS 2 - improving to E F and G, then encouraged to make a bid through the regional hub, had a managing agent allocated ‘Happy Energy’. In terms of delivery, allocation of funds, managing agent and direct procurement system – this is how the bulk of authorities are working. Most of the allocation to be spent by September 2021, likely to have an extension.

Alongside LADS 2 authorities are invited to bid to Sustainable Warmth Fund, low income households (below £30K joint income) LAD 3 is to focus on gas homes and same focus as LAD 2, single measures and all measures are included. Social Housing not to be part of the SWF, not to include any fossil fuels. Home Upgrade Grants, properties off gas, max values are higher, any property without a gas connection, thresholds are between 10 – 25k, can include retrofit of park homes. LA’s have expressed an interest in this funding; do not have to have put an EOI to apply. Kent authorities are sharing learning journey and communicating where in the process, app deadline is 4th August, min bid is £250,000, and delivery is between Dec 2021 and March 2023. Can go as single bid or consortium. LA’s choosing between delivery options – go for funding alone, deliver alone and use procurement, or deliver on own and use procurement through regional hub, others shared by ELG and each have advantages and disadvantages, 15% of the bid can cover resource. If you go through the hub the concern is the size of an LA against others who are also using the hub. 25% of UK delivery for LADs is through EON to date.

Some authorities have put bids in for MEES funding, Thanet and Dover are known to completed bids. Social Housing Decarb Fund – not PSH funding but some teams engaged in this for their authority, to contact ELG with any queries about this fund.

JW asked about LADs 2 for their own housing stock? Dover has stock but not going to pursue funding for their own housing. ELG advised that Thanet are going to use on their Orbit stock (50/50). Also updated that CCC are. JW advised that Ashford are considering a bid for PSH landlords. Maidstone going to use for Temporary Accommodation stock.

SD applied for LADs 1A and B, have given back funding for 1B due to issues with contractors (one pulled out and one with price increases – 30% labour increase). DS advised colleagues to be careful around costing, shortage of labour and cost of materials increasing.

**Action Points March 21 Meeting –** No Matters Arising.

**Returning to Normal & NRLA Update –**

RLA and NLA merged and then went into lockdown, lots of contact from landlords about how to manage their properties through Covid, Government did share lots of guidance and notes. Still have extended notice periods, 1st October is the new normal (pre Covid) notice periods, new legislation ‘Breathing Space’ (additional slides shared with notes), financial support due to end in September and forth coming MEES regulations covered. MM advised that encouraging landlords to keep the communication with tenants on going, many have had a change in financial circumstance, talking through options, be proactive. PL advised a similar approach regarding communications.

Right to Rent – 1st July 2021, landlords now have to do a face to face with tenants to verify their right to rent from the 1st September 2021, meeting tenants in person. There is an online checking system, relying on the tenant getting a share code and giving to their landlord. EU and EEA Nationals have the biggest change, have to show current residence card, with no exceptions on an expired card. EU and EEA tenants should have been applying for settled status by 31st July.

Possession Proceedings – helping tenants, signposting for help, linked up with their Local Authority for assistance. Is possession the best way forward? PL advised trying to differentiate between those who can’t pay and those who won’t pay. Delays in Court, from 1st June Bailiffs can execute warrants but only where sure that no Covid symptoms are in place.

A lot of tenants finding not meeting referencing guidelines due to references (CCJ’s) and income levels and not meeting the affordability criteria (2/5ths of income has to cover rent).

Rents are rising – they are dropping London, the SE is keeping robustly strong and rising. The low LHA rate does make it difficult to afford homes in the PRS.

Breathing Space Overview – estimated 9 million people in debt across the UK, clear that arrears will be paid off and not written off, can only use Breathing Space if have a valid way to pay off the debt and have to continue to pay their current rent. A proactive way to look at a debt solution. PL advised that if a tenant applies for Breathing Space then the landlord should be advised.

**iHowz Update –** PL advised that they share a weekly email update, happy to add officers to the email subscription. ACTION – colleagues to confirm via RS who would like to receive the email.

**HIA Updates –**

**Written update from Susan at Swale Staying Put -** We are catching up with the DFG work that was put on hold last year.  One of our builders we had to stop using as quality was not as we like.  We are carrying out lots of health and safety checks now and this is creating a lot of handyperson works.  We are visiting all our clients that were hospital discharge cases over the past year and doing a health and safety on those.  We are noticing lots of issues like grab rails and key safes needed with these cases as I expect they were just eager to get out of hospital and so things were missed before, as visits in homes were not carried out.

 We are just starting to use a new procurement for our stair lifts, which we hope, will speed up this process in future. We managed to get some funding for white goods for clients that were effect by Covid and have spent £7,000 on this including getting 15 portable radiators to use over the next year for vulnerable clients that heating breaks down.

Peabody Update - DC updated from Peabody, remain unable to go back to their offices, awaiting the next road map announcement. Successful recruitment to a Handy Person post recently and appointed to a hospital role in Dartford. Appointed a new graduate surveyor in the north of the County, working with SDC to support additional roles and initiatives in this area. Supply chain and delivery of DFG’s impacted by procurement of materials, some contractors who will only price and hold it for two weeks currently due to the market and cost of materials. Retendered Schedule of Rates recently. A lot of work coming through and managing expectation is the key for Peabody, explaining the shortage of materials and impact on delivery.

**KMSEP Update** – Not in attendance.

**KEEP Update** – AM provided an update, DP has stepped down as Chair for KEEP, AM and Sandra Woodfall are now co-Chairs. A group of colleagues developed a template for HECCA, then personalised and submitted by 31st May. SGN still obliged to offer connection to households who are financially/fuel poor households. OO’s can still access Warm Home Fund, has been extended, first time gas connection – some funding for first time central heating, but not the full costs so LA’s may have to support. Authorities still delivering on LADs 1A and LADs 1B, a lot of work going on. DBC have been asked to provide a case study on LADs 1. Bays awarded LADs 3 funding through the regional hub, no documentation about the running of the hub, DDC have their meeting with Happy Energy this week.

LA’s do have to have bids for LADs in by 4th August 2021.

Social Housing Decarb Fund – LA’s to bid for this and consortia bids with LA’s and RP’s. Kent Energy Deal, continuing to offer collective energy scheme. Anyone from across the country can join on line, a supported and no obligation scheme but authorities engaged do offer support for their vulnerable residents. Likely, that variable tariff will increase in September 2021. AM has heard that the price of gas is likely to increase too.

Took a decision at Kent not to go forward with Solar Together Scheme until spring 2022.

KCC have confirmed that Warm Homes Framework does end in September 2021 but KEEP did agree to extend the framework to December 2021.

PL asked about an easy read guide for landlords about all the funding. The customer journey and how to explain when it is difficult for local authorities to understand. ELG advised that Thanet DC will produce a Landlords Guide and will share.

**Countywide JMG Discussion –** Currently there are two JMG’s for Kent, an East and West Kent and JW shared an idea about once a year having the two groups meeting to go through case studies and other issues. NB agreed that this would be a good approach, suggested twice a year. **ACTION** – NB and KP to organise as the two JMG Chairs, working with JM and her colleagues, to agree dates and share with regular colleagues. JM agreed a good idea and use the virtual platform to bring all colleagues together. West Kent JMG due to take place shortly. Request from Lloyd about whether he can attend the JMG meetings as a Medway representative but NB unsure of the Governance for the JMG. In principle, NB has no objections to Medway attending, to discuss as part of the wider JMG conversation. JM advised that due to have a countywide financial meeting in September/October.

**AOB –** JW advised that Robin Kennedy is retiring, wishing him well and thanked for his support and sharing of experience. JW thanked RS for her support as she is now moving on to a new role within Ashford BC, Helen Miller will replace RS in the role of Partnership Manager. James Cox from TWBC has moved on, he has moved to Mid Sussex, his role is out for advert for currently.

DS asked about filthy and verminous properties – serving notices on a number of properties, anyone have experience of dealing with these if not your stock and the housing provider is not assisting/managing the situation? GP advised that SBC have had experience, have been under the BCF using money to clean properties rather than through enforcement and liaising with the housing provider. DS advised that under their current housing policy are not permitted to give safe and secure grant to social landlords which prevents some work to be undertaken. Working with DC in recruiting a Hoarding Officer via Peabody, in conjunction with West Kent. NB advised that the key is to work with the provider; the aim is not to evict these tenants. HS advised worth exploring if they can access homeless prevention funding, another avenue to consider.

JW stressed that these meetings are for everyone, please let JW know about any items for the agenda, speakers etc.

**Date of next meeting – 7th December 2021 –** likely to be on Teams, consider 2022 to meet in person