**Information Brief February 2022**

**Asset Management Group update**

The first asset management group meeting took place on the 1st October 2021. A presentation from Dr Peter Rickaby, on Energy and Sustainability Consultant BSI Retrofit Standards Framework and PAS: 2035: 2019 was delivered and well received by the group. The following question and answer session looked into many areas of retrofit and all members took away some learnings that will assist in decision making on future retrofit projects.

West Kent Housing shared details of their new portal from IRT Surveys DREam which will assist on understanding the current position and journey to Net Zero. Both of these will assist with the Objective from the K&M Housing Strategy; Share and learn from best practice locally, regionally and nationally to implement positive change to how homes are maintained.

As this was the first meeting volunteers were sought for Chair and Vice Chair. The volunteers were Neil Diddams, Chair, and Mark Breathwick Vice chair.

At the second meeting in December Dipna Pattni from Greater South East Energy Hub gave a presentation on future funding and how asset managers can access it. She covered the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, with phase 3 to begin in January 2022. It’s likely that Private Registered Providers will be able to apply directly this time, not only through their local authority. The group discussed how to retrain staff to ensure they have the skill sets needed for the new technologies. DP advised that the retrofit Academy can help with this and also invited people to contact her and she can help people make the connections needed.

We also had presentations from the South East Consortium on a new zero carbon framework and Wondrwall on infrared heating aiming to make properties carbon neutral.

It was agreed that the ToR include a reference to delivering the relevant objectives of the K&M Housing Strategy, and meeting 6 times a year.

A sub group has also been arranged so that several HAs can work together to deliver Net Zero projects on different archetypes so the learnings can be shared. The first meeting is on the 18th January and will feedback to the main group. This aligns with the objective (Strengthen the partnership working to include how Kent Housing Group respond collectively to local or national consultations that will impact upon the safety and well-being of Kent and Medway residents)

In 2022 the group will look at fire safety, decent homes 2 and resident involvement along with the current topics.

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| **Theme** | **Key Objective** | **Action** |
| Working together for safer homes | Anticipate, influence and shape implementation of new legislation and regulatory regime to improve the quality and safety of homes across the public and private sectors | Presentation delivered by Golding Homes and West Kent on how they are delivering compliance |
| Working together for safer homes | Develop an even closer relationship with Kent Fire & Rescue around prioritising fire safety in all tenures, housing new and old, planning and infrastructure, prioritising any emerging legislation and regulation as a result of Grenfell | To be considered in 2022 |
| Working together for safer homes |  Share and learn from best practice locally, regionally and nationally to implement positive change to how homes are maintained  | Disrepair presentation from West Kent and Golding Homes on how this is being managed. Review of damp and mould policies planned for 2022. We have a sub group looking into Retrofit options and sharing learnings |
| Working together for safer homes | Explore and learn about how new technology or approach can positively impact upon the delivery of new homes and enhance the condition of existing stock | We have had presentations from Wonderwall on new heating systems |
| Accelerating Housing Delivery | Explore, learn and share knowledge and experience of Modern Methods of Construction and to realise ambition regarding opportunities for off-site construction within Kent and Medway | To be considered in 2022 |

**Engagement Group**

The virtual November meeting went ahead with eight HA/Councils in attendance.  Lin Perkins from Golding Homes spoke about the CX Feedback tool that has recently been implemented and how it works with customer surveys and feedback. We spoke about the White Paper and Helen Critcher also had an ask around digital skills/Wi-Fi in sheltered schemes. The first meeting in 2022 will be held in February.  It will remain virtual for the time being and we have two external speakers coming along - Life and Progress and CX Feedback to talk about two projects they are currently working on with Golding Homes.  Helen Critcher and Lewis Kinch have also stepped down as Chair/Vice Chair, with February being the last meeting that they will Chair.  Emails have been sent to all members of KEG and we are hoping for volunteers to put themselves forward next month.

**Events Group**

KHG events group meetings are held monthly, changing to bi-monthly from January 2022. The next meeting is in March.

* KHG Awards - We have started work on the 2022 KHG Extraordinary Awards. The ceremony will be digital and held on 12 October. We are currently looking for sponsors and getting quotes.
* Marketing KHG membership – We have identified the housing associations that are active in Kent and not yet part of KHG. Group members have met with Maxim to see what they could do for KHG and are seeking a quote. We are also identifying other companies who may want to bid.
* Marketing costs paper will to go to the KHG Executive Board at end of March.
* Unplanned future events – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Event & Working Group, Domestic Abuse event, Promoting the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy. We are encouraging all members to complete the spreadsheet and survey monkey questionnaire for the DI event.
* Subgroup members - We are looking for new members for the group following a couple of members stepping down. We will be looking at what skills and expertise we feel are missing from the group and will then go out to members asking for people to join with those skills.
* Newsletter – a newsletter was sent out in December; we are looking into resource and frequency for these in the future. Next one potentially March/April.

**Housing, Health and Social Care**

We are happy to communicate that the project officer role supporting the Housing, Health and Social Care Sub Group has be funded for one more year, until 31 March 2023.

Since our last update to you we have continued to progress delivery of year one actions from our 2021-2023 action plan and our meetings remain themed and aligned to the priorities of our action plan. In December, our meeting was themed to Tenancy Sustainment and Support where guest presenters shared best practice with members.

Our next meeting, due in March 2022 will be themed to Mental Health. We are planning some interesting agenda items on a topic close to everyone’s heart.

**Housing Strategy and Enabling Group (HSEG)**

HSEG met virtually on 16th November 2021, with Emma Bartlett (Canterbury CC) as the new Chair of the group, the role of Vice Chair is still unfilled. The group received verbal updates from partners including the Home Buy agent from Jodie Stringer, Rural Housing update from Tessa O'Sullivan and a SELEP update from Brian Horton.

The meeting was largely focussed on the new affordable homeownership product: First Homes. The Local Authorities shared and discussed their interpretation of First Homes guidance and how it will be implemented. Following the meeting the group submitted questions and comments to DLUHC and have received a response.

The next meeting will be held on 8th February 2022. The group will focus on the K&M Housing Strategy work programme and review the Rural Housing Protocol (in light of First Homes). HSEG will also be joined by the chair of the Essex Housing Strategy and Enabling Group and the Essex Rural Housing Group, in turn, the Kent chair (Emma) will attend the Essex meetings as a way of extending the pool of shared knowledge, best practice and experience.

**Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership (KEEP)**

KEEP meeting are not taking place as regularly at present as many of the key decisions around LAD and ECO have been discussed

LADS2 – Due to the fact only one of the four Managing Agents has agreed contract terms with GSEEH, LAs were offered the WarmWorks have been appointed by GSEEH to deliver measures under LADS2. Councils were offered the chance to liaise with Warm Works to undertake measures in their area, opt to use Procure Plus DPS set up by the North West Energy Hub or request funding direct from Energy Hub. All 3 options meant Councils need to sign undertakings, some Councils’ Legal/ GDPR sections have voiced concerns over the wording in the documentation and have reverted back to GSEEH for clarification/ amends. Warm Works were based in Scotland and therefore since November have been setting up operations in the South East. Due to limited delivery timescales (referral submitted by 31 March 2022 with measures installed by end of June 2022) the Managing Agent advised Councils that it would not be possible to ‘spend’ all of the funding and measures would be limited. Council’s wanting to pursue the Direct Grant Award would need to sign documentation by 31 January – GSEEH response/ changes still required to legal/ GDPR documentation to give address LA concerns. As mentioned in previous update GSEEH are meeting with Kent Councils on an individual basis and it is down to decision taken at District/ Borough level as to which route to follow, therefore an unable to provide Kent Wide overview of course of action.

ECO4 – BEIS intend that ECO4 will move to a whole-house approach based around multi-measure projects. This requires significant changes to the scoring methodology used in ECO3 and to that end Ofgem published a consultation on the scoring methodology (part 2) on 13 December 2021 with a closing date for responses by 21 January 2022. Therefore, it is anticipated that there will be a transitional period between the two (expected to be a period of 3 months with ECO4 starting in July).

Whilst exact scheme details are still unknown gas boiler replacements will be significantly reduced compared to the allocation under ECO3. It is also worth noting that Broken Boiler funding has already been impacted with the final phase of this funding under ECO3 being withdrawn by most of the Utility Companies.

Members from KEEP had been meeting with KCC on a regular basis since March 2021 to discuss the possibility of receiving some funding focussed on relieving the impacts on households of COVID/ Furlough to address some of the gaps in funding insulation/ heating measures through the differing Government/ Energy Company Obligation schemes. These discussions were overtaken when the Chancellor announced the Household Support Fund and KCC was awarded £11m to be spent by end of March 2022. KCC provided each Council with a proportion of this funding, and it is understood that each Kent Council took differing approaches to how this money was spent. KCC have also provided Green Doctors with funding to provide Fuel Vouchers for vulnerable residents. It should be noted that the fuel vouchers only apply to residents on pre-payment meters and do not include residents supplied by British Gas.

The unprecedented increase in global gas prices continues to put financial pressure on suppliers, most recently (18 January 2022) Together Energy (a subsidiary of Bristol Energy) announced that it was ceasing to trade. It is almost certain that Ofgem will the price cap (announcement due February 2022) in April 2022 which will undoubtedly have a huge impact on all households with the Insulation Assurance Agency predicting that fuel poverty could increase from 4 to 6 million customers. Businesses are also having to increase prices to cover higher fuel bills, resulting in further pressure on the most vulnerable households.

Kent Energy Deal - The next auction will be held on 15 February 2022. However, it may well be that the result is the same as the October 2021 round, when no fixed tariffs could be secured as those offered were far in excess of the Standard Tariffs. At that time advice to residents was to remain on their current Standard Tariff or stay on their fixed tariff. Whilst this is far from ideal Kent Energy Deal does provide participating Authorities with the opportunity to help residents to achieve affordable warmth by giving them information on grants available to improve the energy efficiency of their properties and how best to conserve energy.

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund

Wave 2 of the SHDF is expected to open in spring of 2022. It is expected that Registered Social Landlords will be able to apply in their own right as well as being open to Council applications.

Kent Solar Together Scheme - is due to open for registration on 7 February with an auction being held on 15 March 2022. Installs from the first scheme are due to complete in February 2022 (delayed due to COVID and supply chain issues). The discount achieved in the first Kent Solar Together scheme was on average 33% against the typical market price. There is no guarantee that a similar discount will be achieved in the next round, however a discount in the region of 20% is anticipated.

### The Kent Affordable Warmth Strategy – The updated Fuel Poverty Strategy for England, Sustainable warmth: protecting vulnerable households in England is currently being reviewed, to ensure the contents are included in the Kent Fuel Poverty Strategy – revisions will be made when resource and time allow in 2022.

**Kent HomeChoice**

A KHC Operational Meeting was held in October 2021 and a further meeting is to be held in January 2022.

A number of enhancements went live on the system towards the end of 2021.

We are expecting the automated annual reviews function to be on test within the next week or so.

Since writing the Housing register overview report in Summer 2021 which identified a backlog of between 4- 5,000 applications waiting to be registered, this has reduced to 2,635 as at January 2022. We also have 3,319 applicants that we are waiting on to upload their documents so that they can be assessed. This contributes to the objective in the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy *Continued commitment and support for Kent Homechoice, working to ensure choice and transparency with regards to access to affordable and social housing across Kent and Medway.*

We have started the process of going out to tender for the contract to provide the housing systems for Kent & Medway. The specification is currently with KHC Partners for feedback.

One further pre tenancy training videos have also been produced since our last report. This contributes to the objective in the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy *Explore what housing tenure and type/products are appropriate to meet diverse housing need, and how support can be provided to successfully sustain a tenancy*.

**Kent Housing Options Group**

Since the last updated was shared with KHG, KHOG have met twice, a full membership meeting and an LA only meeting.

Colleagues from the DLUHC HAST updated that the department was going through a transition phase having been renamed from the MHCLG, Michael Gove being appointment as Secretary of State and at the time were awaiting the outcome of the spending review. The big news from our HAST colleagues was in relation to rough sleeper funding, with the announcement of the launch RSI-5 funding programme, this being a 3 years programme for 2022-25 and that there would be another round of RSAP funding in 2022 with the South East being a possible priority area for this.

The group saw presentations from the Social Interest Group (SIG), who gave an evaluation of a study carried out evaluating the impact and outcomes achieved of supported accommodation for ex-offenders in the Link House housing for ex-offender scheme in Maidstone, as well as an overview of SIG itself. A presentation from the South East CFO activity hub that operates in Medway and supports ex-offenders engage with mainstream services, to help them avoid re-offending.

Since the last update COMF homelessness prevention project went live with all Kent districts receiving 75 % of their initial allocation of funding to support renters facing eviction due to the impact of Covid. Maxim were appointed to promote the availability of the funding with a targeted campaign on social media channels. A dedicated landlord website designed and went live providing information, advice and details of where landlords could seek support for their tenants facing the financial strains cause by the Covid pandemic. Press releases were made to the media with KHG chair Sharon Williams conducting a live interview on BBC Radio Kent.

KHG protocols continue to be developed and reviewed with working groups established to review the Young Persons protocol and Intentionally Homeless Families protocol. Work also continues on the Domestic Abuse management move reciprocal protocol being led by Lisa Clarke from Clarion Housing.

The Mid-Kent Procurement team updated KHOG on a procurement exercise for temporary accommodation being undertaken for Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells, with consideration being given to a Kent wide procurement exercise. However, the Mid-Kent procurement team felt that such a piece of work was too large to be undertaken by them.

The final KHOG in December 2021 saw the last meeting for Stuart Clifton (TWBC) as chair. Lora McCourt (CCC) the KHOG vice-chair unfortunately also need to resign from the role, before being able to take over as chair due to changing roles within her organisation. Manpreet Bhupal (GBC) accepted a nomination for taking over as vice-chair, whilst John Littlemore (MBC) KHG mentor for KHOG has agreed to take on the interim role as chair until a permanent chair can be appointed.

The KHOG terms of reference were also reviewed and updated.

**Kent Private Sector Housing Sub-Group**

Julian Watts completed his first year as Chair of the Kent Private Sector Housing Group and will continue to be the Chair for 2022. Sue Oliver, Private Sector Housing Manger at Tunbridge Wells Council has kindly agreed to become the next Chair for 2023 and will be undertaking the role of Vice Chair for 2022.

At the last meeting is was agreed to only hold two meetings a year, preferably in June and December and to be continued online through Teams. However, June’s meeting could be held in conjunction with the forthcoming Rise event to be held at Detling Show Ground in June, subject to any possible restrictions from Covid.

KPSHG continues to share ideas and provide information and updates on various schemes across Kent. The group comprises of various agencies, from the home improvement agencies to landlord associations, all providing valuable updates on what’s going on and any problems.

Following KPSHG previous update the group has only held one meeting. Funding schemes to address fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions, which links into the Kent & Medway Housing Strategy, objective relating to Health & Wellbeing are still ongoing. Many local authorities across Kent are doing their own schemes through LADs 2 and many are looking forward to the rollout of ECO 4, the next round of funding from the government to improve energy efficiency within properties. This is likely to be implemented in April/May providing funding for both private rented and owner occupied properties to carry out improvement, ranging from insulation to air source heat pumps.

ECO4 funding will provide funding to improve people’s homes across Kent, reducing carbon emissions and bringing down fuels costs. This will go significantly towards the Kent & Medway Housing Strategy and meeting one of the objectives relating to Health & Wellbeing.

The group discussed the Medway Housing Strategy, and how Private Sector Housing teams across Kent are already implementing some of the main policies, especially around Health and Wellbeing, by promoting the success of the Hospital Discharge Scheme and supporting the objective of the Kent Fuel Poverty Strategy. The Kent Fuel Poverty Strategy is also up for review to reflect changes in funding and addressing fuel poverty. This review will be ongoing through 2022.

Work continues in achieving the goal of providing a hospital discharge service to all our major hospitals across Kent and for all local authorities to be included.

Going forward; the group will continue to focus on those topics that play an important part in improving people’s lives, especially within their homes, from disabled adaptions to address our ever aging population and to improve homes for all. I look forward to Chairing the meetings for 2022 and working with Sue (Vice Chair) and would like to say thank you to all those who attend and contribute. I feel the PSH group will continue to play an important part in contributing to the Kent Medway Housing Strategy.

**Tenancy management group update**

The tenancy management sub group have fed into the proposal for enhancing reciprocal arrangements for housing and domestic abuse cases and look forward to working this through with colleagues – consultation is currently being undertaken with partners.

To support the delivery of the Kent Strategy for safer homes, we have considered best practice opportunities for communal areas, bin store area improvements and heard about the pilot ran by Ashford Borough Council. Members are keen to be involved in wider roll outs of the programme in 2022. To support the strategic delivery of affordability, we continue to share good practice through discussion and shared experiences for managing income, digital inclusion, fuel and food poverty, and allocations.

The role of Chair from January 2022 has passed from Genette Pinwill (Golding Homes) to Felicity Dunmall (GCHA), and Julie Terry (West Kent) will be Vice Chair.  We are keen to ensure there is good representation across all local authorities partners as well as registered providers and invite all members to remind their teams where not represented on the sub group opportunities to join us.