**KENT HOUSING OPTIONS GROUP**

**NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON**

**15 December 2016**

**Maidstone BC, Maidstone House**

**Present:** Stuart Clifton, Marie Gerald, Vicky Hodson, Victoria May, Lynn Wilders, Robin Cahill, Jane Lang, Elly Toye, Roxanne Sheppard, Ian Hirst, Jane Smither, Bev Jackson

**Apologies:**  Andrew Kefford, Deborah White, Linda Lauris, Sylvia Roberts, Lora McCourt

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| **1.** | **Homelessness Triage Tool** | Ian Hirst from TWBC attended to present the Homelessness Triage Tool. He explained that his team work to improve Digital services across Kent and were successful in a bid for funding from LGA to develop a Homelessness Triage Tool.  Initial workshops to develop the tool were held at Gravesham and a prototype has been developed which is adaptable to accommodate any change in legislation.  IH confirmed that SDS team should be able to change the questions and responses for no additional expense once this becomes necessary.  KHOG raised concerns about getting this in place prior to legislative changes and IH explained that analytics will be built into the form so worth introducing as will be a useful tool for this period and will gather analytics on who is using the tool and where they are.  Next Steps YoYo developing prototype and carrying out some service user and officer testing.  Domain name of [www.helpwithhomelessness](http://www.helpwithhomelessness) has been purchased.  Presentation attached. | **VH to obtain and send out presentation** |
| **2.** | **Update on 16-25 Accommodation Strategy & YP Protocol** | KHOG had raised a concern that the 16-25 year accommodation Strategy & YP protocol had been updated but that KHOG officers hadn’t agreed to crashpads and RC was invited to clarify position.  RC explained that KCC carried out consultation in Jan 2015 and received the go ahead to present outcomes at KHG.  It has been decided to continue the existing contracts for a further year with the aim of putting new contracts in place by April 2018. Paul Carter at KCC has said that the impact on partners must be considered. It is likely that services will be slightly remodelled during the interim period.  RC explained that the £3mil budget was split 78% to those on the edge of care and 22% for statutory provision.  A trial around a new process of referrals is being carried out at The Limes (Belgic Court) with Ashford Borough Council and Golding Homes. With the previous contract, anyone could refer in but for Belgic Court the agreement is that only 18plus care team and ABC Housing Options team can make referrals and there will be a panel that will make a decision.  The new contracts will go out to market in Spring and market engagement will take place in the Summer, tender will go out in Autumn.  In principle 50% of units in the future will be statutory and the remainder will be for edge of care.  MG raised question of other clients with RC and whether all supported accommodation going to come under one umbrella.  Issue raised that young people aren’t able to afford to stay in supported accommodation if they get employment. Some work must be done with staff at the units to change the advice that they are giving their young tenants.  RC advised that in the new Protocol accommodating means that KCC have a legal duty to assist .  Until new support contracts are in place it was considered that crashpad would actually be a good scheme to be rolled out across the County funded by Homelessness Prevention Grants.  MG suggested that crashpad units need to be identified before Councils can look at and agree funding.  There is some ongoing confusion about requirement and funding for crash pads.  Concluded that South Adolescent Teams have been working on a system whereby any 16 or 17 year olds can be referred directly to a central referral system and assessed within 24 hours. If there is a housing need a joint housing assessment would take place.  In the future all 16 and 17 year olds will be referred to KCC for an initial assessment and if there is still a housing need then there will be a further joint assessment with the Local Authority housing team. They will be stepped up if there are safeguarding issues or a CHiN.  KCC to attend JPPB meeting to discuss protocol. |  |
| **3.** | **Minutes and Actions/Matters Arising** | Not discussed by group agreed to revisit to ensure actions had been completed. |  |
| **4.** | **Homelessness Reduction Bill** | Clause 1 which is the definition of homelessness or threatened with homelessness is being completely rewritten. Within duty there is not an expectation that a Local Authority will help to secure and not ‘pay’ for accommodation. It also seems that there will be a combining of the reviews as presently there are 4 review stages.  It is possible that the Bill may legislate changes so that when an agency refers a client to a Local Authority it implies that the agency is then involved in assisting the client.  ET advised that there is a parliamentary meeting each week to update the wording in the new legislation.  There are general concerns about not only the amount of applicants but the amount of paperwork that will be generated from changes to the law.  Feedback from Wales is   * expect applications to increase by 1/3 * 10% drop out rate from applicants withdrawing their application. * 50% of applications from single people who would previously have received basic non priority advice. * Only 23% of applicants were helped to obtain accommodation from where they presented. * 77% helped into alternative accommodation of which 34% were social housing. * Full duty acceptances reduced by 70% * A reduction in TA and B&B   JS advised that there is no information in the Wales report on re-applications.  The group raised concerns about how to recoup costs for accommodation for those subject to universal credit.  Andy Gale report to be circulated which includes a template for a cabinet report to ask that cabinet recognises the additional pressures.  Useful DCLG factsheets on gov.uk website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/homelessness-reduction-bill-policy-factsheets>  Amber Christou has written a cabinet report which she is happy to share.  MG raised benefit cap changes as part of welfare reform.  LHA will also be applicable to social housing tenancies.  Universal credit will have been completely rolled out in Kent by April 2018. |  |
| **5.** | **National Policy** | SC advised that changes to replace TA management fee will now be called a homelessness grant and the formula for this will include acceptances, preventions to private rented sector, demand and will also incorporate private rental fees. There is no further information on the actual formula, figures to be announced in January 2017.  MG informed the group that the Shelter report on homelessness figures which shows Dartford with highest figure of homelessness in Kent however the calculation includes people in total rather than number of cases and is taken from the following:  TA figures  Rough sleepers  Hostels  Social services, numbers in TA placed by social services  The total for Dartford was 347 and of South East region Kent Authorities are in the following order Dartford, Medway, Ashford, Swale, Canterbury, Sevenoaks, Thanet, Maidstone, Dover, Tunbridge Wells, Shepway, Gravesham, T&M, |  |
| **6.** | **Protocols** | No discussion |  |
| **7.** | **Recent Case Law** | MG to share report from Garden Court Chambers | **MG** |
| **5.** | **Training Opportunities, Including Local Training** | Training on the new Homelessness Reduction Bill needs to commence as soon as possible for front line officers.  MG advised that Dartford will be running review training in January 2017. An overview of the course will be sent out shortly.  ET suggested that we may need to employ an officer to carry out reviews.  BJ recommended NHAS Webinars. | **MG** |
| **6.** | **Affordable Private Rented Sector** | Sevenoaks Council are developing a private rented housing scheme and had queried whether properties could be advertised on Kent Homechoice and whether there should be a Kent wide ‘protocol’ for lettings these type of properties.  VH had advised that properties could be advertised on Kent Homechoice however there could be difficulties in finding tenants in terms of those on the register being able to afford these properties. VH advised that discussion with Lesley Clay and Rebecca Smith had concluded that good practice guidelines may be more useful than a protocol.  We need to consider next steps around this.  VH asked if there might be scope to develop a lettings agency approach across councils to avoid paying estate agency fees for letting these types of property. Also suggested possible need to open up or hold a separate housing register.  JL raised concerns that if a council owned property is let via the housing register it could trigger a right to buy so we would need to be particularly cautious. |  |
| **7.** | **Election of Vice Chair** | MG to email out to ask who would like to be Vice Chair.  RS to ask who would like to be Vice Chair  Vice Chair would need to assist Chair, cover Chair at meetings and become Chair in the future. Role as Chair in addition to KHOG would involve attending KHG, responding to requests for information also organising working group for homelessness reduction bill  Everyone from KHOG thanked MG for all of her hardwork at Chair. | **RS to send request with notes of meeting** |
| **8.** | **Any Other Business** | VH raised referrals module, now usable across all of Kent and some Kent wide partners have already been added to the system, NHS Family Nurse Partnership, Live It Well and ESOL will also both be on the system shortly. KHOG asked if Porchlight, Stonham and Early Help could be added with commitment from officers to make referrals in this way.  VH also advised that there have been discussions with virtual college about on line pre tenancy training which could become a requirement in order to be offered a tenancy. We will have an opportunity to feed into the development of the module and then consider whether it would be something that we would want to use and how it would be used.  JS raised an issue with landlord insurance issue with landlords unable to get insurance from Direct Line if tenant has come from the Local Authority. Other areas say this is a known issue with Housing benefit tenants.  ET advised that had been informed that EK Housing discharge offer letter did not state that it was a final offer so worth all checking final offer letters to ensure they are compliant.  Right to rent requires original documents  FOI request where unable to extract data for Locata but ET has suggested using P1es for the data required.  Query raised whether any homeless acceptances discharged to Private landlord with AST, TMBC confirmed that they have done this. |  |