**KENT HOMECHOICE PROJECT BOARD ACTION DECISION LOG**

**25 September 2019**

**MAIDSTONE TOWN HALL**

**Present:** Vicky Hodson, KHC, Chair; Ellen Black, ABC; Jane Collier Smith and Pal Sander, KCC; Jo Mahieu, WKHA; Sarah Lewis, TWBC; Lorraine Godward, L&Q; Jo Danston, DBC; Anita Birring, MBC; Rebecca White, MBC; Pam Millington, DDC; Lynn Wilders, GDC; Laura Knight, Clarion; Ian Long, MHS; Laura Miles, FHDC; Jonathan Proctor, housing partners; Nina Colley, SDC; Anna Dale, CCC; Chessy Spencer, Golding; Debbie Fitzgerald, TCH

**Apologies:**

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| **Reference** | **Notes** | **Action/Decision** | **Lead Person** |
| **Minutes of meeting 27 March 2019 and matters arising** | Agreed |  |  |
| **Pitch Allocation & Site Management** | Jane Collier-Smith and Pal Sander, KCC Presentation:  KCC run 8 Gypsy sites in Kent plus 2 managed for Maidstone Council. Criteria for a plot is that an applicant must be from the Gypsy / traveller community.  The applicants complete a form and are assessed and pointed based on need, then placed on list subject to vetting. Issue with this is that the process is not transparent and some applicants wait for years on the list. Applicant with high needs can also take priority for the pitches and they have been heavily criticised for this. The current policy has been in place since 2012 but has been similar for 20 years.  KCC went out to public consultation in 2017, and are going out to further public consultation in 2019. They have developed two new policies, one for site management and allocation and one for fees in order to make the system fairer.  They would like to work in partnership with the districts to move from points to bands. KCC wish to understand if there are any barriers to the Local Authorities assessing the applications. Currently there is no advertising process but they would like to get to a stage where pitches can be advertised via Kent Homechoice with a nomination being sent to KCC by the LAs.  There are 131 pitches across Kent and around 100 on the waiting list.  Many applications come from out of Area and it was raised that this would complicate the banding process in terms of local connection. Those that apply per district usually wish to stay in area.  JW mentioned difficulty in getting consistency in polices, especially considering local connection. KCC advised that they would be happy for our own policies to be applied.  KCC advised that their current policy is that they don’t turn any applicants away but were advised that this would happen if the authorities use their policies.  It was also raised that applicants could have to apply to 13 different authorities if they wanted all areas. For a consistent policy then KCCs own policy would be beneficial.  Some Local Authorities manage their own sites and VH asked if there was interest from the authorities that hold their own sites to include those on Kent Homechoice.  A decision is still to be made as to whether KCC should form their own policy or put it to authorities to use and tweak theirs own allocations policies.  It was agreed that we need to set up a working group and that KCC will circulate their own policy within the next month. The working group could carry out an exercise of banding and provide feedback comments.  Concern was raised from those that don’t have sites as to whether it was worthwhile undertaking the work involved when they will never have any pitches to advertise however KCC would like them to align for fairness across the board. |  |  |
| **Homeswapper Tracker** | It has been agreed that we will no longer promote Exchange Locata from the end of September 2019.  Links and reference to Exchange Locata need to be removed from all our websites / advertising.  Many partners have already moved to Homeswapper.  Jonathan Proctor from Housing Partners delivered a presentation about Homeswapper:  Uk’s biggest exchange service. They can work with us to come up with solutions, one of which is Homeswapper.  Homeswapper is mutual exchange swap site, simple and clear for tenants or landlords. Helps to reduce void times and cut down on re-let costs. Can be set up as a national or local system. If the Housing Association or Local Authority don’t subscribe then the tenant pays. Eddie can supply areas statistics.  Jonathan advised that Homeswapper is simple, apps are available, photos easily uploaded, free for your tenants if you subscribe and helps facilitate an exchange.   * They can offer marketing material * They have a dashboard for your own statistics and have analytical tools. * Eddie, the account manager, can attend tenant events * Also have a ‘Right size’ feature to recommend swaps. * Can use for hard to lets although conflicts with KHC. * Has Pre tenancy Financial Check facility available * Helpdesk for tenants   Future development via working with customers.  If interested contact VH who can put you in touch with Eddie. |  |  |
| **TA System** | Locata are in the process of building a new TA system, there will be functionality to be set up against the property or tenancy.  It is an add on to purchase if we would like it.  There will be a TA dashboard of tasks set up for TA tasks needed. i.e. reminder for gas safety certificate test.  Credits and debits can be scheduled in which it can populate the financial summary report.  Some authorities have already set up their own systems that feed in from the actual payments systems.  Further information will be available later on in the year. |  |  |
| **Bedroom eligibility** | Dover would like automated bids and adverts not to show for certain customer profiles.  I.e. when the youngest child reaches 14 the family are then ineligible for a house so should be stopped from bidding on them.  If anyone is interested in this and sharing the cost please contact Ellie. Canterbury has a similar policy. |  |  |
| **Adding in Mobility Questions** | Mobility 1,2 and 3 are to be removed from the system eventually and will be replaced with more specific details about an applicants accessibility requirement. There will be new fields in the back office to specify whether the applicant requires each of the accessibility standards and whether it’s essential, desirable or not applicable.  Information relating to the customer will need to be gathered over a 12 month period and then the same type of date will be added to the property wizard as a mandatory requirement so you will be required to specify whether the properties have those adaptations. This will improve matching.  Some authorities advertise prior to inspection and they feel that there may be issues around staff being able to recognise certain aspects within a property.  Applicants will need OT reports so that the officer can add the details to the file.  Those Housing Associations that don’t have notice periods would not be able to inspect in time but VH advised that you could say no adaptations. This happens already and if the property is inspected after advert, it can be pulled and re-advertised with the correct information.  Ashford advised that just because you state the adaptation, it doesn’t mean the bidder is entitled. If they have high neds they will view with an OT and can be declined.  Icons for the new pieces of information will be on the advert. |  |  |
| **3 Bid Limit** | All agreed prior to remove three bid limit. We can implement at any stage, In terms of notifying customers to say from January no limit on bids. Consensus on campaign to inform customers of this change. |  |  |
| **KHC Update** | **Change of Circumstances**  Working group met to determine issues. We will need to put a 2 factor authentication into the system to enable a portal style system for the customer.  Additionally, anyone not on the new form may need to re-register. May need a different process for vulnerable applicants. Some back office fields will need to be locked down to enable the customer to be in control of that or the officer changing it from the front end. We need to consider how it links with HPA2 and also must insure that we inform support services. We would like to introduce automated reviews.  Next steps being discussed with Locata and Sector. Will be costly so we have been paired with Tewskesbury Council who are doing the same project. We have a meeting with them in October. In the meantime, it is proposed that the text prior completing the current change of circs form to advise that they only complete it if they have had a change of address or household and not income.  TCH advised that they would need to know about changes in income.  Let VH know if you want this added.  **Pre Tenancy Training Working Group**  We now have five videos that are ready for the website. Simple and informative.  **KHC Website**  WCAG2.1 due to come in next year and the website has now been made compliant. It is to assist those that use assisted technologies such as screen readers.  **Pre Assessment and Online Form**  Smarter Digital Services Team have reviewed these and they have recommended a lot of changes. These have been put into a specification and they will be completed mid October.  **Accidental Log In**  There is a quirk in the system whereby if an applicant has placed a bid on a Housing association property, every system user with permissions for the housing association can see the applicant’s details. This is being removed.  **Project Board**  The Project Board had made the decision that Property Companies will not become partners due to them having their own policies. They can only use campaigns to advertise their properties.  **Photos**  The majority of the photos that are uploaded to the KHC website are of poor quality or are taken from google.  Outcome is that Locata will alter the property wizard to allow us to upload larger images that will automatically be resized to fit but will prevent mall photos being permitted.  If you upload a Google Image, you need to state that you have taken it from Google. This will become a mandatory part of the new system. However, from the moment it is not good practice and should not be done.  If no image, the advert will close after 2 days. It was felt that it would be better to not be able to publish in the first instance.  Ashford asked if we can load photos after advert made live.  An additional change as part of accessibility improvements for screen readers is that the photo will need Aria labelling, which must be a concise description of the photo. This change should come into effect within the next 6 months. VH to send more information regarding this.  **Contract with Locata**  Project Board has agreed that the 3 year contract with Locata will be renewed for one further year for now and will decide in a year’s time about the additional year.  **Locata Issues**  Seem to be associated with move to the Azure Cloud. Financial penalties to be discussed for future contracts due to knock on effects. |  |  |
| **AOB** | **Alms Houses**  AD wanted to ask about Alms Houses and how they are advertised. Someone advertises for the Alms provider and sends the nomination in the normal way. Dartford advised that they advertise on behalf of alms houses and use the authority’s policies.  **Sage**  TWells. New HA is about to advertise and needed to check if partner. Yes Sage are a partner.  **Brexit**  JW raised issue of Brexit and asked for assurance. No guarantee on data exchange, he would like to ensure that the data is in the UK now. Vicky has been advised that the plan and position is the same. He would like reassurance as the information is currently in two European locations.  **References for Customers**  DF Asked about references and the difficulties of getting through to other HA’s / authorities. Would like good contacts circulated. Contacts need to be circulated. Some put it in the customer’s hands to provide a reference but this is not possible for ASB. List of contacts would be useful. |  |  |
| **Date and Venue of next meeting** | Ashford has volunteered to host. Next meeting will be 10 am on Wednesday 25th March 2020 |  |  |