**Kent Housing Group Sub Groups**

**Kent Housing Options Group**

KHOG has continued to meet virtually each fortnight with a focus moving to discussions around the ending of temporary accommodation to those persons accommodated under the ‘Everyone In’ response, whilst trying to ensure there is no reason to the street for many individuals, and the move-on options that have proven successful. The group has discussed and shared current practices surrounding new rough sleepers and ‘non-priority’ individuals at risk of sleeping seek assistance, with the district housing authorities taking a pragmative approach when deciding whether any form of temporary accommodation can be provided and many adopting an approach of verifying new rough sleepers.

Support and guidance continues to be provided by the HAST advisors from the MHCLG who provide an update at each meeting on information from central government and updated on both revenue and capital funding.

Updates are regularly provided by the lead KCC commissioners for domestic abuse, young persons services, adult homelessness services and substance misuse services and with district housing authorities sharing any operational updates, including discussions of any ‘return to office’ planning.

Work continues on the Young Persons Homelessness Protocol, with volunteers from both KCC and district housing authorities updating to include the feedback and suggestions from Kim Davis, MCHLG specialist young person’s advisor.

Various data and information requests have been asked of the group from both KCC Public Health, the Kent and Medway CCG and via the KRF CIC.

The group continues to share any updated on any changes in relevant legislation and housing case law.

**Kent Tenancy Management Sub Group**

This group have met three times virtually since the Covid-19 pandemic commenced, having just met on 2 July. Each meeting has continued to concentrate on the management response to Covid-19 including lettings, managing rent collection and arrears, sharing good practice and new ways working. The Group are leading a virtual good sharing session on 22 July for members and are keen to promote this across all member organisations and their front-line teams. The aim is to share innovation and promote learning and development for teams during this time of critical change and response. Attendance generally within the Sub Group remains steady and consistent which is very positive and the networking has proved very beneficial for joining up approaches and adapting to new customer experiences.

**Kent Private Sector Housing Group**

The KPSHG are due to meet virtually through video conferencing in mid-September (date to be confirmed). June’s meeting was cancelled but written updates were given to group members. We are asking members to provide verbal updates at the meeting in September rather than the usual written ones in order to make the meeting more interactive.

Kerry Petts – Chair of the KPSHG has been contacted by John Littlemore who is participating in a covid recovery panel. He has been alerted to the issues surrounding getting DFG monies spent for this year and the hold up with OT assessments due to OTs doing urgent priority work only, through the lockdown. Together with JMG Chairs we are trying to negotiate a way forward to get the DFG assessment referrals coming back through to help our residents and hopefully alleviate pressure on social care from the other end. Any assistance or ideas from John or the panel would be gratefully received.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service have written to all Kent PSH managers advising that they are withdrawing from our Kent fire safety enforcement protocol from 1st July. The Chair of the Kent Housing Technical Group, Richard Hopkins, has sent a letter on behalf of all LA PSH teams stating our disappointment and pointing out that by withdrawing from the protocol there now is no agreed protocol which may have an impact on cases in individual areas. If it is not clear as to who should be taking enforcement lead in certain types of residential properties this may result in debate and difficulties in the future. We currently await KFRS’ response and hope that they will agree to negotiate a new protocol going forward.

RISE 2020 event has been cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Members have been taking advantage of the many different free webinars provided by Landlord Associations, Solicitors’ firms, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and others. They have served to keep us informed and allow us to continue gaining valuable CPD hours.

Most PSH teams are now getting 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.

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

We cancelled our June meeting in light of Covid-19 and due to the increased demand this pandemic put on our membership colleagues to provide additional front line support. Our next meeting is scheduled for September and will be held virtually.

During this time we have been; ensuring Public Health messaging have been reaching colleagues, delivering on our joint campaign work, exploring training opportunities, conducted a mid-point review of our action plan and ascertained members delivery priorities from that action plan going forward. We have also written KHG members an interactive e-newsletter with useful information for their customer/clients in the aim of offering them some support during this uncertain time.

**Housing Strategy and Enabling Group**

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Group met in early June with the impact of Covid-19 on housing enabling and delivery on the agenda. A small working group from the main HSEG has met twice to develop an action plan for the group, based around the action plan from the emerging Kent and Medway Housing Strategy, reflecting the recovery to Covid-19 where appropriate. The group has also completed the Rural Housing Protocol with a Foreword from Baroness Warwick, this is due for sign off by the KHG Executive Board over the next few weeks. In September the group will meet again, this is a planned virtual meeting with the agenda to be confirmed.

**Kent Engagement Group**

Kent Engagement Group met virtually on 1st June to discuss the challenges of delivering resident involvement and community development services through lockdown, sharing best practice on the new normal of zoom conferences, online workshops, and managing staff remotely. It’s clear that there has been a huge change in the nature of what our members do, if they are even doing it at all at the moment, so the meeting provided a much needed support platform to reassure members they aren’t alone. A lot has already changed since June, so we’ll meet again and fingers crossed we’ll be out engaging with communities again soon.

**Kent Events Group**

Work continues to plan for events or training for the remainder of 2020 and into 2021, these in the main are likely to be virtual sessions. A successful Housing Ombudsman session was hosted at the end of June and this will be followed up by two further sessions around Repairs Complaint Handling and ASB and managing unreasonable behaviours, dates for September and/or October 2020 and details of the overview for each session will be shared in due course.

The Events Group are now agreed that an Awards Ceremony for the KHG Excellence Awards will likely be postponed until Spring 2021, with the hope to have a smaller but still a successful event for colleagues to attend and receive recognition of their execellent work or achievements. There is now work on to revise the categories and to work with the intended venue to secure a date and time for 2021.

Details about Prevent training have been shared but will be circulated once more, as will details of the planned Hoarding training through West Kent Mind which is planned to be delivered virtually in the autumn of 2020. All KHG members are asked to contact Rebecca with any requests or suggestions about events or training that KHG could assist with facilitating or delivery of.

**Kent HomeChoice**

The KHC Project Board met in June 2020.

Those attending the Board meeting unanimously agreed to extend the contact with Locata for a further year (taking the contract to 2023). The development of a more up to date Social Lettings Agency module was discussed and it was agreed by a vote from the Project Board that this project would go ahead. Work is underway on a specification for the new enhanced module.

The Kent Homechoice website is now compliant with WCAG 2.1 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) ahead of the September 2020 deadline.

The KHC Board would like to work jointly with KHG to develop best practice for virtual tours and sign ups.

The Change of Circumstance project for applicants logging in to make changes to their applications is now at test stage.

Improvements to the property images and the ability to upload virtual property tours are due to be ready on the system in the next month.

**Corporate Parent and Children’s Commissioning**

**18+ Private Rental Sector Referral Scheme:** To date, during the Covid-19 period, we have received over 50 referrals for YPs and have had 7 YPs move into private rented accommodation.

**Preparing for Adults (Disability):** A meeting between KCC and Housing colleagues was recently held to discuss work on Disability and preparing young people for adulthood. The 4 pillars of this work are Social/Community, Education and Employment, Health and Housing

With particular relevance to Housing, there are two strands to this work, one is about the strategy side and how to stimulate the market to ensure that there are sufficient accommodation units developed to help widen the offer for disabled people; not just access to social housing but also shared ownership options etc.  The other is about the more operational side, what housing options are there outside of a homeless route and practical information to ensure that tenancies or movement into new accommodation settings for this cohort are successful.

**Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:** Three reception Centres currently in operation: Millbank (Ashford), Appledore (Cranbrook), and Oakwood (Maidstone).  Appledore and Oakwood are temporary arrangements with the latter being used as quarantine for new arrivals (14 days), which has now been lifted unless it cannot be evidenced that they have spent more than 14 days in France.  There were 85 new arrivals in June 2020.  Via the Governments National Transfer Scheme 121 offers from other local authorities have been received resulting in 46 UASC being move-on from Kent.

**Move-on:** This continues to be challenging for all supported accommodation services with many reporting capacity issues to meet demand.  For example, in Shared there are currently 692 YP placed with 145 of these being 21-years and over.  A further 105 YP with become 21-years in the next six-months.

**YP Joint Homeless Protocol:** following guidance from the MHCLG the protocol has been redrafted with a focus on professionals; a service user focussed leaflet has been designed with the aid of young people to be shared with homeless 16/17-year olds.  The protocol has also been expanded to include the accommodation Quality Standards based on the recommendations from SCIE and NICE.  The draft is currently with KHOG for their final amendments and then it will submitted for sign-off through the various partners governance pathways.

**Additional Countywide Group Updates**

**Kent and Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership**

The Kent and Medway Warm Homes Scheme is now back to completing installations following enhanced safety and social distancing procedures.

KMSEP partners are looking at future options for providing an energy efficiency home offer for residents, following on from the KMSEP Retrofitting Framework which officially ended in October 2014. We are currently working to extend our existing contracts for heating and insulation works to 2021 due to COVID19 to ensure there is no gap in our offering.

Solar Together Kent, a collective solar PV buying scheme, was set to launch in March but had been postponed. Nine Kent districts and Medway council signed up to participate. The scheme hopes to encourage the uptake of solar panels for residents and small businesses across Kent. Registration for the scheme will now open on the 31st of August 2020 and preparations for the scheme are underway. There will now also be an option for homes with existing solar panel installations to install battery storage systems through the scheme.

The Energy and Low Emissions Strategy was due to launch at the Kent Environment Strategy conference in June. While the conference has been postponed till November, we are still working to release the final strategy soon.

The next meeting of the Project Board will be taking place in July.

**Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership**

Due to current situation with COIVD-19, the delivery of many schemes have slowed down but are operational again. The Partnership is continuing to deliver the following:

Contract and promotional delivery with SSE on the Warm Homes Funding. KEEP was successful in obtaining Warm Homes Funding to develop off gas connections and first time central heating from the Category 1 (Urban) and Category 3 (Park Homes) funding. 7 Kent Local Authorities supported the funding applications.

Off Gas Scheme with SGN – currently collecting referrals for future processing once operational. Funding from SGN is in place until 31 December 2020 for first time gas connections and first time central heating installation. SGN are currently seeking OFGEM extension to the scheme.

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 ends in September 2020. At present KEEP is working to secure extensions to existing contracts due to COIVD-19. This is to ensure that heating and other energy efficiency measures are in place for vulnerable residents during Winter 2020/21.

Still delivering 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 been postponed until August 2020. 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.

**Homes England Update**

Homes England is maintaining regular contact with our partners in industry and Government, supporting the housing sector to continue to operate as effectively as possible during this challenging period. We welcome the Prime Minister’s recent commitment to building more homes, investing in communities, transforming public land and rethinking how we develop our population centres. We will continue to support local partners to deliver their bold plans for places and communities.

The additional £450m secured for the Home Building Fund underlines our determination to support SMEs and innovators. We are serious about diversifying the housing industry and creating a more resilient sector. The extension of the current Affordable Homes Programme gives Housing associations and our Strategic Partners the certainty they need to keep building and growing their development pipelines. We have been building our capability and developing new partnerships and we now stand ready to help the country build back better and greener. We are grateful to all our partners for continuing to work closely with us, particularly those partners with whom we have transacted with in recent weeks.

**SOAHP Extension – announced 6th July 2020**

• The Government announced that it would be extending the delivery of the current AHP

• The announcement set out that the programme has been extended by 12 months – the extension applies only to longstop dates that partners are currently contractually obliged to deliver against and does not apply to any new CME brought into programme this financial year.

• To note that there are different longstop dates for partners (depending on what type of partnership they have with Homes England)

• The new long stop dates for the programme are:

• SOAHP (non-Strategic Partners)

o Starts: March 2022

o Completions: March 2023

• Strategic Partnerships:

o Starts: March 2023

o Completions: March 2025

• Homes England has commenced one to one conversations with partners about specific schemes for which an extension is requested. These conversations will start the process of an assessment of current commitments and forecasts; movement of forecasts will be by exception.

• Given the size and scale of the programme we anticipate that discussions will take place over July and into August.

• All new offers submitted through CME will need to deliver to the original programme timetable with start on site being achieved by March 2021 and Completion by March 2022.

**Homebuilding Fund – 6th July**

The Government announced help for smaller developers to access finance for new housing developments by boosting the Home Building Fund with an additional £450 million of investment. This is expected to support delivery of around 7,200 new homes.

**Next Steps Accommodation Programme**

Launched 18th July 2020

• There are now around 15,000 people who were sleeping rough or at the risk of sleeping rough who have been provided with emergency accommodation in response to Covid-19 – of those, around 10,000 are outside of London.

• At the Budget 2020, the Government announced £380m of funding - £236m of capital and £144m of revenue – to deliver 6,000 homes for long-term, move-on accommodation for rough sleepers. They have since committed a further £52m of revenue – bringing the total to £432m.

• On 24 May, Government announced that £161 m of this funding - £130m of capital and £31m of revenue – would be made available in 2020/21 to deliver 3,300 homes for long-term, move-on accommodation.

• On 24 June, the Government announced a further £105m of revenue to deliver interim accommodation for rough sleepers e.g. supporting people into PRS tenancies and/or securing alternative uses of hostels, hotels etc.

• Together, the £432m for long-term, move-on accommodation and the £105m for interim accommodation form the Next Steps Accommodation Programme.

• Homes England was approached by Dame Louise Casey, who is spearheading the Government’s Rough sleeping Taskforce, to support the delivery of the 3,300 homes of long-term, move-on accommodation in 2020/21.

• The agency has agreed to perform a ‘Delivery Partner’ role – but MHCLG retain accountability for spend and delivery.

• In practice this means that the agency will engage with and advise partners, support the co-production of proposals, assess and make recommendations of proposals, and administer funding for proposals requiring capital and revenue, including processing applications for Investment Partner status and bringing providers into contract – but MHCLG will make funding decisions.

• The agency’s work will be led by the Affordable Housing Growth team – pulling in additional expertise as required.

• Proposals can only be brought forward by local authorities, but they will be expected to demonstrate how they will work collaboratively and in partnership with other partners, such as Registered Providers and voluntary organisations.

• Applicants will need to be (or become) an Investment Partner before drawdown of funding.

• The types of accommodation eligible for capital grant funding include purchase and repair of properties, refurbishment and repurposing of existing stock, private sector leasing, and development of new build properties.