**Information Brief KHG 6th October 2021**

**Asset Management**

The forming Asset Management Group is due to meet on 1October to hear a presentation on PAS;2035, the framework for delivering energy efficiency projects. It is expected to discuss the contents of the forming Terms of Reference and seek volunteers to be chair.

**Engagement Group**

After the July’s meeting was postponed (due to it being in the summer holidays and low invite acceptance) the group met virtually on the 15 September. As we hadn’t held a meeting for a long time we didn’t have any external speakers and used the session as a chance to information share and update the group on any projects/events that had taken place over the summer months.  We also spoke about stigma and the white paper event that will be held in November, how people are currently capturing customer feedback and what topics we would like covered at the next meeting on the 24 November. This will be held virtually, with the hope that the three meetings in 2022 will be held in person.

**Events Group**

The KHG Events subgroup have been working hard planning a number of events over the coming months.  All of the events will support themes within the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy and those coming up are specifically around accelerating housing delivery, affordability and health and wellbeing.

We’re also planning for the KHG 2022 Awards. We’ve reviewed feedback from the previous awards and a virtual ceremony was a popular chose.  We’ll be looking to set a date and get a new nomination process out to KHG in the coming months.

**Kent HomeChoice**

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

Jane Lang has resigned from Tunbridge Wells and as Chair of the Kent Homechoice Project Board and has been replaced by Vicky May from Gravesham who will now also attend KHG.

We are expecting a number of new enhancements to go live on the system during September:

* An enhancement to the size of documents that can be uploaded to the system for a number of LAs
* Improved picture upload for adverts
* Bedroom/household override enhancement
* Amendments to change of circumstance process
* Sending emails to someone other than the client on HPA2

The Housing register overview report which was produced to provide a picture of the backlog of new housing applications has now been shared with Kent Housing Group.

Since writing the report and, as at 6th September 2021, the backlog of housing register applications across Kent and Medway is at 3928 (online to be validated), this was previously c5,000. We do also have 3,619 applicants that we are waiting on to upload their documents so that they can be assessed. (Objective A9 of K&MHS).

The updated Partnership Agreement has now been sealed although two of our KHC partners did not sign up to the new agreement so will remain on the terms of the previous version of the agreement.

Two further pre tenancy training videos have also been produced since our last report. (Objective A2 of K&MHS).

We are also in the process of adding several new questions to the online application form to identify if anyone applying to the register might be eligible for assistance with COMF. (Objective HW8 of the K&MHS).

**Housing, Health and Social Care Sub Group Update – September 2021**

Homelessness was the theme of our September meeting. Four guest presenters joined us to share their best practice in this area. This was the first themed meeting since agreeing our sub group’s immediate priorities from our new Housing Health and Social Care Sub Group action Plan 2021-2023, back in June.

Our next meeting in December will be themed to Tenancy Sustainment and Support. Whilst our March 2022 meeting will be on Mental Health.

As a sub group, we have agreed to hold three meetings a year online and to have one in person. We have found that using Teams, in what started out of necessity, has actually enabled more colleagues to attend our meetings. However, we value in-person relationships so agreed to have an extended in person meeting every March to make time for networking and relationship building.

Finally, we would like to share with you that 501 people across nine member organisation have expressed an interest in the domestic abuse training offered. Training is due to start September 2021.

**Kent Housing Options Group**

KHOG have met once since the last updated was shared with KHG, an LA only meeting, as well has having held an extraordinary meeting to focus specifically on the KHG COMF project.

The KHG COMF homelessness prevention project bid was successful, with KCC awarding £2.5 million funding for KHG and the 12 Kent district LHAs. The project is making excellent progress with the MOU’s having been circulated to LHA’s to sign and return before funding can be released to each district. The landlord advice website and video are both in development, with the content having been finalised. Amendments are being made to Kent Homechoice Housing Register application forms to enable information to be gathered on persons applying for social housing who have been impacted financially by Covid and who may be appropriate for support under this project.

Colleagues from the MHCLG HAST continue to provide updates on national policy, legislative changes, homelessness statistics, rough sleeper programme updates and funding opportunities. Information shared on the latest homelessness statistics published by MHCLG, headline information is:

* Single households made up 72% of households owned an initial duty.
* Covid measures to protect renters during the pandemic year resulted in a 41.4% reduction in households owed a homeless duty following the end of an AST, compared with previous year.
* Impact also seen on temporary accommodation, with fewer households with children moving into TA and more single households accommodated.
* An increase in homelessness in offenders.

MHCLG colleagues informed KHOG that a letter will be sent to LAs CEOs on 13th September detailing the support that will be offered under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy and detailing the support for evacuated UK nationals, former Afghan refugees in the UK who now have family members joining them here.

KCC commission colleagues continue to provide update in the different service arears, including young person, homeless adults, and domestic abuse services, including details of the re-procurement steering group event for the Kent Homeless Connect service and recommission of the young person’s floating support and accommodation service.

Katie Sorrell, Probation Service, attended to explain details of the CAS3 scheme, which will provide 84 nights of accommodation for people leaving prison, BASS or AP accommodation. Questions and discussion held around concerns over procurement arrangements and ensuring properties met required health and safety standards.

Work is continuing to re-develop the Intentionally Homeless Families protocol, with a draft version of the new protocol almost finalised. The aim of the new protocol is for LHA and KCC to jointly support vulnerable and complex families at an earlier stage in homelessness journey. There is also work underway to develop arrangements and a reciprocal agreement for domestic abuse survivors between social housing providers. A project initiation document drafted by Lisa Clarke, tenancy specialist manager at Clarion, has been circulated and discussed with KHOG members

A request made for volunteers new Vice-Chair for 2021, as Lora McCourt will be stepping up as Chair from 2021.

**Kent Private Sector Housing Sub-Group**

Julian Watts has become the Chair of the Kent Private Sector Housing Group following on from Kerry Petts. Meetings are held three times a year, and have been held online through Teams due to the current climate and are likely to follow this format until at least the end of this year.

KPSHG meetings provide opportunities 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.

This year’s meeting’s agenda has led to updates and discussions around the government funding schemes to address fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions. Sustainable Warm Funds, ECO funding and Decarbonisation Funding and new acronyms to add to the mix such as HUGS and LADs. Such schemes are very important as fuel prices rise and climate change impacts on all of our lives. These schemes 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. Over the coming years the government will be providing more funding and therefore this is likely to become an important agenda item for future meetings.

The meetings have highlighted some of the potential problems facing the HIA (Home Improvement Agency) who work closely with local authorities in delivering disabled facility grants. As we start to come out of COVID this has brought about challenges in providing grants as costs for materials for works have shot up and in some cases difficulty in sourcing supplies. It is hoped that these problems will reduce as the economy picks up.

The HIA have also worked with a number of local authorities in providing hospital discharge schemes, by setting up Hospital Care Coordinators to assist in reducing the pressure on our hospital by freeing up beds. These schemes are vital as hospitals are struggling to deal with ever increasing number of patients. These schemes focus on providing care in the community, which provides a significant opportunity to free up hospital beds. Going forward the goal is to provide such a service to all our major hospitals across Kent and for all local authorities to be included. Some local authorities have partly funded Care Coordinators to great success. Future meetings will discuss best practice and discuss ways to roll out fully across Kent. This also relates to the objectives set out in the housing strategy.

NRLA and iHows are two landlord associations who regularly contribute to the meetings, with updates on the latest regulations and issues for landlords in the private rented sector. Matters that landlords are facing currently is rent arrears and the length of time it takes to apply for possession of their properties. Some landlords have had enough of all the red tape and are selling up, this is likely to have an impact on the housing market. Private landlords are vital in providing housing across Kent and local authorities are keen to engage with them. Providing decent affordable rented properties also has an important part to play in the Kent Housing Strategy. Future meetings will allow us to keep up to date on issues facing landlords.

Going forward; the group will continue to meet regularly to discuss 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 and would like to say thank you to all those who attend and contribute. I feel the PSH group has an important part to play in contributing to the Kent Medway Housing Strategy.

**Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership**

Virtual KEEP meetings are being held on a fortnightly basis to offer support to LA Officers against the backdrop of the many changes happening in the energy efficiency world.

LADS1A project has ended in accordance with Government timescales. The tools down date on LAD1a was the 31 August 21. Through the Dartford BC consortium bid various Kent LA properties have received funding towards energy efficiencymeasures. Dartford BC as fund holder is currently completing and submitting final reports to BEIS. Sevenoaks DC is in a similar position as it also received funding.

LADS1B – Dartford BC successfully bid for funding under this stream – in the main for its social housing stock however a limited number of owner-occupied properties were included. Government have agreed an extension to deliver until end of March 2022 and a change of measures approved to accommodate the high costs of EWI to blend with lower cost measures such as CWI. There has been increased interest generated through the LADS1A project. Awaiting outcome of request for additional funding as at present there is a waiting list of suitable properties now in place.

LADS2 – Greater South East Energy Hub (GSEEH) is administering this funding and at the date of submitting this report the scheme has yet to commence (it is understood that final governance/ contracts are yet to be signed). Government have extended delivery timescale until end of March 2022. Each LA has a specific amount of money allocated via LAD2 based on the fuel poverty figures in their area and each LA taking part in LAD2 will have projects operating in their area based on their proposals provided to the GSEEH.

LAD3/HUG Sustainable Warmth - Kent Authorities, either jointly through the GSEEH or in their own right have submitted applications to the Sustainable Warmth Fund (LADS3 and HUG funding streams). Funding announcements due this Autumn – with successful projects due to commence in 2022.

BEIS consulted on and is in the process of finalising the EOC4 scheme design. This is the largest domestic energy efficiency scheme (£4bn) over 4 years due to commence 2022. Shift for greater investment and more complete upgrade for worst performing homes. The Energy Company Obligation is an obligation for Energy suppliers to provide financial support to enable vulnerable residents to achieve affordable warmth. Councils are able to refer vulnerable residents to installers whom suppliers have allocated funding, or in some cases direct to Suppliers. Government have committed this funding therefore it will not be subject to change under future Spending Reviews.

Councils with housing stock are invited to submit bids into the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund by 15 October 2021 and encouraging consortia bids with RSLs. Social Housing providers will need to match fund.

Kent Warm Homes Scheme – the Kent Warm Homes Scheme supported by KCC has now closed. KEEP had drawn down from the Kent Warm Homes Framework to ensure that a contract to continue insulation measures and heating replacement was in place until 31 December 2021. Currently ECO funding is still available to support measures for eligible residents

Kent Energy Deal’s next auction will be held on 12 October 2021 to help residents see if they can secure a better tariff. Energy market volatility has led to several energy companies ceasing to trade and escalating energy prices, reflected by the increase in Ofgem’s price cap applied to variable tariffs.

Labour and material shortages are leading to delays in some projects, for example the Kent Solar Together and many of the LAD1a and LAD1b projects across the UK.

**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. We continue to share good practice through discussion and shared experiences for managing income, estate and allocations. A recent discussion on customer satisfaction surveys and outcomes has shared insight on the current challenges meeting expectations of customers following an unprecedented year and a focus on getting back into communities to support tenancy sustainment and reducing noise nuisance cases.

To support the delivery of the Kent Strategy for safer homes we wish to approach Kent Fire and Rescue Service to discuss new ways we could partner on communicating with residents about maintenance in their home for examples such as communal door replacement programmes and access for repairs and servicing to help raise the profile of social landlords working with customers to keep homes in good safe conditions.

The role of Chair and Vice Chair for 2022 is currently open for expression of interest shared at our recent meeting too.