**Present**: Tracy Allison, Vice chair & WKHA; Linda Hibbs, Tonbridge and Malling BC; Helen Charles, TCH; Paul Koster, Dartford; Brian Horton, SELEP; John Littlemore, Maidstone; Daniel Killian, Gravesham; Ashley Jackson, Thanet; Shola Alao, Hyde; Linda Perkins, Golding Homes; Cathy McCarthy, WKHA; Louise Taylor, Dover; Mark Breathwick, Medway; Caroline Smith, Mel Anthony, KCC; Mike Barrett, Porchlight; Nick Fenton, Kent Developers; Sasha Harrison, SHG; Abigail Agba, Sevenoaks; Paul Clarke, Kent Public Health; Maria Jacobs, Moat; Helen Miller, KHG; External Speakers; Ninesh Muthiah, Christine McGill; Sarah Cox; Simon Sim; Liz Harrison, Becky Ashley;

**Apologies:** Sharon Williams, chair of KHG & ABC; Simon Thomas, Kent Planning Group; Rachel Valerio, Riverside; Nicola Bowen, Choice Support; Vanessa Biddiss, Optivo; Jo Ellis, TCH; Marion Money, NRLA ; Allison Duggal, Kent Public Health;

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| **Reference** | Notes/Outcome | When | Who | Action/Decision |
| Introductions | Speakers and members were welcomed.  Tracy Allison explained that she will be chairing as Sharon is on sick leave. |  |  |  |
| Homefinder UK | Ninesh Muthiah of Home Connections and Christine McGill from Habinteg gave a presentation. The PowerPoint slides will be emailed with these notes.  Homefinder UK is a national mobility scheme that aims to bring social housing applicants, homes and landlords together in one portal.  The Accessible Now partnership began in London and is now available across England. The aim is to match people with a need with the suitably adapted housing. It will help providers to let accessible or adapted homes and tenants to find the home they need.  CMG from Habinteg explained there are a general needs housing association with a specialism in accessible and adapted homes. They wish to see more accessible homes in the market place yet are aware that developers are concerned that the homes will remain empty and they hope to address how to ensure that people can find the homes with the features they need.  There is a huge need for accessible homes but appears to be an information gap on helping people find these homes. The presentation outlined the kinds of information that people with a disability needed on property listings to help them see whether the homes would be suited to them. This is the information they need to make an informed decision on whether they would wish to request a viewing. This helped them to identify the key advert information for wheelchair users which were; property access; bathroom spec; stairs info; adaptations; kitchen specs; floor plan; parking; transport; photo view and local area. Photos provide very useful information and reduce the amount of text needed. OTs supported the processes and this helped create screening forms and checklists for property assessment.  JL said that in Kent we use the Locata system. How would the proposal fit with that? NM explained that they can categorise properties which helps standardise. They can help with households who are not finding the suitable home in Kent and would wish to move elsewhere in Kent. CMG Habinteg are keen to share their insights.  CMC Locata is quite fixed on what can be put in the system. The checklist would be very helpful. CMG have found the checklist useful to use at the void stage.  NM happy to share the checklist.  TA how does the service help the whole household? Homefinder is open to all ages and household types, and around need to move households away from any area, for example to flee gang connections.  HM to pass NM and CMG details on to Vicky Hodson who manages the Homechoice service. |  | HM | Pass NM’s details on to VH |
| Charity Shop Gift Card | Sarah Cox shared her presentation which will be circulated. It’s a gift card that can be used in all charity shops that have signed up. It aims to give people choice on the items as they can shop for free in charity shops.  She has worked with the Charity Retail Association and charity shops must be registered with them to join the scheme. So far Pilgrims Hospice as signed up and Marie Curie, Barnardos, Heart of Kent Hospice and others are joining soon. Some shops can buy in second hand reconditioned goods if appliances are needed.  The card can be loaded by amounts from £20 to £500 and the card may be physical or virtual onto the client’s phone. It is a cashless scheme and change goes onto the card, not as cash. A time limit can be set for when the card is valid if for short term need.  It promotes a circular economy and reduces waste. It will also support charity shops recover from the impacts of the pandemic. For service users it gives an element of dignity and choice over the items they choose.  Can be used for support in the community for donations after a disaster and can be used to help giving within the community.  CS said KCC are responsible for care leavers in Kent. Current help is around preparing to rent and setting up home allowance. A prime need is around furniture.  LP what are the difficulties for charities to sign up? The EPOS requirements at the tills have been a barrier. Charities do spend 15% fee on their sales but can make 10% if they sell the cards. When you have more shops signed up can you report back as that is when the card will become more useful to our clients  MA Responsible for KCC Welfare Provision. Can we talk about how to bring this into Kent Offer  BH highlighted Abacus and Optivo’s furniture store as may be relevant here. |  | MA | To make contact with Sarah Cox on how to align with the Kent Offer. |
| Social connectivity project | Simon Sim of KCC gave a presentation from KCC and Liz Harrison  The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport’s Project Gigabit is about providing full fibre broadband to provide a reliable and fast connection. The government target is for 85% of premises to have this service by 2025. We need to ensure this benefit also reaches social housing tenants. Fast, reliable, Broadband provides great benefits to your tenants, socially and economically.  Landlords are likely to receive more wayleave applications. Currently some landlord asset managers may lack capacity to deal with these applications. Some may struggle with the technical side. The operators have the legal right to request access. Landlords may not profit from this but could aim for it to be cost neutral.  KCC wants to provide a platform to support social landlords to address any issues around wayleave agreements. This includes creating a database of key contacts in social landlords; creating a standardised Kent agreement to help social landlords have an agreement they’ve had input to and understand; provide social landlords with a voice on shared difficulties.  Invitation for wayleave administrators. Please sign up to the wayleavers database at [www.digitalkent.uk](http://www.digitalkent.uk)  Simon is also presenting to the KHG Asset Management Sub group in April. |  |  |  |
| Corporate Parenting update KCC | Caroline Smith from KCC highlighted there are 1730 children in care and 2000 young people who are care leavers in Kent.  She expressed her thanks to all who for contributed to Christmas campaign. This resulted in all receiving a present.  The National Transfer Scheme is now mandatory. KCC has not seen the UAS transfers speed up yet. Kent will now be hosting people before they move on to their host LA.  OFSTED has indicated it will change the regulations regarding accommodation for 16-17 year olds in April. This may impact on Millbank, semi-independent providers and shared accommodation. When CS has the detail she will share more details. |  |  |  |
| Homes England update | Becky Ashley from Homes England said that the White Paper has not been released yet. The key issues form Homes England are;  To encourage all LAs with programmes with them to ensure they spend the full amount before the financial year ends.  They are still open for continuous market engagement, and would like to encourage local authorities to consider the affordable homes programme. If you wish to discuss please contact BA by phone or email  LA and RPs are invited to tell BA about imminent schemes and those in the pipeline.  The fifth bidding round for the Rough Sleeper programme will open soon. Focus for round 5 is on move on accommodation and long term accommodation its goes across 2022-23 and 2023-24. [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rough-sleeping-accommodation-programme-2021-24](https://gbr01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Frough-sleeping-accommodation-programme-2021-24&data=04%7C01%7CBecky.Ashley%40homesengland.gov.uk%7C8e3bcf59d83442a33c3108d9e1840062%7Cfaa8e2690811453882e74d29009219bf%7C0%7C0%7C637788779321798244%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=xLTY8E2X0f4OGG1dHs7uA6m4ZftI6KE0KKhrmwluHd4%3D&reserved=0)  BH though White Paper hasn’t been released there have been announcements on Home England being refocused, and how the SE continues to get the funding it needs. BA send she was unable to comment and she will be able to share once the details are released and then she can share with BH, LAs and HAs.  BA will be presenting at the Housing Strategy and Enabling Group later in February.  TA we will need to plan understanding the White Paper into a future meeting so we understand what the future opportunities and challenges are and how we join that up across the sub groups. |  |  |  |
| SELEP HDG Update | Brian Horton from SELEP highlighted the letter to Chris Pincher dated 7th January from Kent and East Sussex developers that has been circulated. They will focus on the White Paper and First Homes. He continues to work with colleagues and uses that to inform the conversation with the ministry. There are also conversations with planning colleagues across the SELEP area over the challenges shortage of planners and what solutions could be.  Nick Fenton of Kent Developers was on BBC South East last week and possibly more this week as they are having a focus on housing. LHAs have written to Michael Gove and George Eustace and so the nutrient neutrality issue is highlighted at all levels, with Chris Pincher also having seen the letter. NF is concerned about the ask that has been proposed to address nutrient neutrality and he feels we need better solutions that we currently have coming forward. They have had a planning approval in Ashford that takes account of some of the mitigating measures. They continue to work with Natural England on the issue which currently focuses on the River Stour catchment area and impacts in Stodmarsh SSSI.  There are issues with water shortages in West Sussex but NF does not expect this to hit Kent in the same way even though there are water shortages in Kent. These environmental matters will continue to present challenges going forward so we need to remain aware of them.  BH monthly engagement with DLUHC and the invitation to let BH know of key issues so he can raise them.  TA highlighted the need to regroup and reflect as the situation now is very different from when the K&M Housing Strategy was signed off. |  | All | Tell BH of any key issues |
| Commissioning Update | Mel Anthony from KCC said that the draft budget [Our budget - Kent County Council](https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/finance-and-budget/our-budget) which includes a proposal for the Kent Homeless Connect service to end in September 2022, with transitional protection funding for 2022-23 and 2023-24. If the proposal is accepted at the KCC meeting on the 10th they will complete an EqIA and there will be public consultation which could lead to a Key Decision for the service to come to an end. KCC know this is a very challenging concept and KCC will work with partners on this matter. This was covered in detail at KHOG and will be taken to the KHG Executive Board this afternoon.  KCC are planning the recommissioning Live Well Kent contract. This will be done around April 2022.  There has been new funding around Domestic Abuse Act and so there is commissioning activity here to improve inclusivity and access including the emotional support services for children and young people.  Supported living KCC has widened the number of support providers in December so providers are now seeking properties and taking on news service users.  The Wellbeing Offer will go live in April for universal wellbeing, dementia support and coordination.  Adult Carers Strategy out for consultation, please share the link [Adult Carers Strategy | Let’s talk Kent](https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/adult-carers-strategy) with colleagues, residents and tenants and highlight that it runs to 22nd February 2022.  The workforce pressures on care sector continues. They still have a large number of adults they cannot get support to and social workers are supporting those people directly.  LH asked what the level of transitional funding will be for the Kent Homeless Connect service. MA explained that no figure has been set but a commitment has been made that it will be sufficient.  MB wanted to clarify the transitional period. He believes that as soon as the decision is made on 10th February staff will begin to leave, schemes will close early and there will be nothing to transition to. He highlighted that a transitional period will not help sufficiently for these vulnerable people. Porchlight are modelling getting people into the private rented sector but if there is no support alongside that these adults remain very vulnerable and the costs of the private rented sector remains high. Ancillary services, like the Single Point Of Contact and the helpline will also go. This will impact on LHA housing options teams who will see more vulnerable clients. They will probably be more Care Act assessments. Porchlight is working with MA regarding the significant problems relating to the ending of the Kent Homeless Connects service.  TA said that the Kent Chief Executives are deeply concerned with the proposal and are gathering evidence on what the impacts will be to fed into KCC. KHOG will also be involved in this.  MA KCC has spoken with KHOG on 27th Jan and hope for a working group to support the oversight of the transition planning. They are also engaging with Kent Leaders and Chiefs and the director with responsibility for housing at each LHA.  JL said item was discussed at Kent Chiefs who are deeply concerned about the proposals and the speed of the proposals and are seeking that this decision to be deferred by a year. An Interim chair of KHOG he welcomes the invitation to work with KHOG and we’re pleased to do. We need to make sure that as we go through this process there is clear acknowledgment that KHOG’s engagement is not taken as approval on the decision. This change would have a significant impact on single rough sleepers who though not necessarily owed a full housing duty are still a concern when we’re aiming to end rough sleeping.  TA highlighted that we may be losing Kent Homeless Connects fund yet Homes England are offering Rough Sleeper funding and could gaps in funding be married up with funding sources? MA explained that KCC are exploring funding options for this vulnerable group and providing a similar service.  MB explained the Porchlight are also liaising with DLUHC. They have been told that the funding cannot be used for supported accommodation and is for outreach for supporting rough sleepers coming off the street rather than preventing them from going onto the street. The rough sleeping funding is also tapering over the next couple of years and will then stop. We need long term funding for these issues.  TA this is a priority for KHG to work together to help the decision makers understand the impact and to find a route through that is as positive as possible. |  |  |  |
| COMF update | John Littlemore explained that KHG made a successful £2.5M bid to KCC for this project which aims to address financial hardship arising from Covid-19 leading to homelessness. It has two strands;   1. Funds to each Kent LHA to address financial hardship arising from Covid-19 leading to homelessness in all tenures, 2. Funds to market the LHAs homelessness service to landlords using the website [www.supportforkentlandlords.co.uk](http://www.supportforkentlandlords.co.uk) and social media, press releases, etc.   COMF funding is for preventing homelessness primarily in the private rented sector but can also be used in the social rented sector and for mortgage arrears. It is for households adversely financially affected by COVID.  Each Kent LHA was sent £131,250, 75% of the allocation, in September and October with the intention to allocate the remaining 25%, based on spend, in December. The allocations panel met in December and found that spending varied very significantly between LHAs and the panel felt this partly reflected the speed at which councils had responded to the project and may not reflect the level of need or the organisations ability to use the funds over the entire duration of the project. The panel asked each LHA to make a projection of their spending for each month and to state whether they would welcome the 25% allocation, or potentially a further allocation, by 14th January.  The KCC grant oversight group has reached a decision and now;   1. All local authorities are being allocated the full £175,000 with an extension to 30th June 2022 2. Dover and Sevenoaks, who have already had their full £175,000,  are being allocated an additional £45,000 to come from the contingency fund, to spend by 31st March 3. The criteria for the project remain the same, as laid out in the MoU 4. To support the project the marketing will be extended to 30th June except for Dover and Sevenoaks where it will run to 31st March   HM has begun the payment process and expects LHAs to receive funds by mid-February. LHAs are asked to continue to submit their monthly data returns to HM by 14th of each month  **Maxims marketing update.**  Relevant updates are being regularly posted on Kent Housing Group’s [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/VoiceofHousinginKent), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/kent-housing-group) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/KentHsgGroup) channels to promote the campaign. A Facebook campaign was run for one week in January on Kent Housing Group’s page targeting adults living in Kent. The primary aim was to attract more people to [www.supportforkentlandlords.co.uk](http://www.supportforkentlandlords.co.uk).  Two further blogs have been drafted and added to the Support for Kent Landlords website offering generic advice to landlords. This content was shared on KHG’s social channels and will benefit the website in terms of Search Engine Optimisation.  A poster was drafted and designed to encourage people to contact their Local Authority for support. This has been distributed to the LAs with the suggestion that it’s printed and posted locally. It does not specifically mention COMF funding to ensure it will be valid after 31 March 2022.  Databases were purchased for Kent-based solicitors, letting agents and property managing agents. Separate emails were drafted for each audience and these have been distributed. An email has also been sent to Local Authorities to pass to their landlord forums, encouraging people to visit the website. A poster has also been produced and sent to Local Authorities to print and distribute with partner organisations.  Maxim is currently seeking opportunities for a follow-up press release which they hope to issue before the end of January.  Brian Horton has agreed to be a spokesperson if Sharon Williams is not available. He has been briefed accordingly.  TA the flexibility of an additional three months will be welcome.  JL highlighted that the latest HCLIC figures showed an increase in presentations as homelessness due to tenancies coming to an end. |  |  |  |
| Equality & Diversity Survey | Tracy Allison explained that the Housing Diversity Network sent out the survey to all members, via HM, with both a survey monkey survey and an excel spreadsheet. This is to let us know our current situation and inform our next steps. The response rate has been low and rather disappointing and TA made a plea that all organisations who have not already responded to do.  BH said that the Housing Diversity Network have offered to do this work free and it would be great to make the most of this opportunity. He made a plea to all to actively address this issue and the first step is to provide the information to inform what is needed. |  | All | Respond to the EDI data collection spreadsheet and survey monkey and questionnaire as soon as possible – if you haven’t already. |
| AOB | HM please let me know what you’d like to go on the agenda so we can keep this relevant and useful.  BH asked that we record our best wishes to Sharon for a full recovery. |  |  |  |