

THE HYDE GROUP
CENTRAL HOME OWNERSHIP PANEL
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 2 MAY 2017
AT PARK STREET FROM 6.00PM - 8.30PM

1.0 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were given from three members. Introductions were made by all.

2 Declarations of Interest

2.1 No declarations of interest were received.

3 Minutes and Matters Arising

3.1 The minutes of 7 February 2017 were approved by all as a true record with amendments from the Chair. Outstanding actions to be added to this meeting's action list as per below.

3.2 External letter boxes issues were discussed. It was identified by members that there have been a number of issues with ID theft in Bermondsey Spa, Peckham and Brighton and historically in New Cross and Northside. The Chair asked all members to go back to their areas and ask if there are current issues, as well as posting on the OAK. **ACTION**

3.3 It was asked how local issues are going to be addressed re 7.3 moving forward. It was confirmed that the update on Look Again may answer this and if not, we will add as an action moving forward.

3.4 Some members are experiencing log in issues with the OAK and stated that most are logging in from the daily summary email. **ACTION**

3.5 The Chair asked for the staff from Home Ownership and Service Charge Teams to ensure that they are providing reports, information or presentations on the OAK one week in advance. Also noted that staff should be responding to threads promptly on the OAK, an example given of the letter boxes post. **ACTION**

4 Update on Housing Services review – Director of Business Improvement

4.1 An update was given about the Housing Services review pilot that has recently been completed in Hampshire. It was confirmed to have been tested in this area to ensure that the new ideas of smarter working and more defined roles would work efficiently in practice.

4.2 It was confirmed to have been a successful pilot and positive feedback has been received from staff involved. There had been some feedback about one of the roles not being able to see through a case from end to end, but this was deliberate so that they are specialising only in the legal elements, freeing them up to take on specific complex issues within numerous cases.

4.3 The structure of the pilot is being reviewed over the summer months. Staff will be recruited to the revised roles based on skill set and suitability for the role in a formal selection and recruitment process.

- 4.4 It was asked how the revised roles will benefit homeowners. It was stated that they will be in place for all residents regardless of tenure and would ensure good stewardship of schemes and estates. One of the key roles would ensure communal repairs are timely and satisfactory, that the schemes/estates are safe environments through rigorous compliance and that grounds maintenance and cleaning are of an acceptable standard. They would also be responsible for improving Hyde's data on schemes/estates. We should have clear information about schemes and estates, i.e. where the meters are, where keys are held, are the lifts needing maintenance. This information will help to ensure that local knowledge is captured on Hyde's systems.
- 4.5 To have this level of local knowledge in the system will help with the validation and accuracy of service charges and also will help to ensure accurate responses when people call in to query. This will support the work Hyde are doing to improve the service charge systems.
- 4.6 It was asked how the reviewed roles will work with Hyde New Homes and it was confirmed that new schemes will be brought into management by the revised roles and as such they will help to specify services and what the service charges are likely to be. They should be applying the learning from previous schemes to make continuous improvements.
- 4.7 Structured data about schemes will be captured in Hyde's key ICT systems. Additional useful local information not recorded in these systems will be recorded in a consistent way in a 'Scheme book' so it is accessible and useful to all staff who need it.
- 4.8 The new structure has been tested in a pilot first, which has been worth the additional time as the processes have been properly tested.
- 4.9 CHOP – there is a risk that existing and unaddressed issues could be lost in the roll out of new roles and ways of working. The review will be planned with operational managers so that work in progress is mapped and handed over so nothing is lost as new ways of working are introduced.
- 4.10 The review will result in a clearer definition of roles, including accountability and better authority by staff to escalate and action issues, including Grounds Maintenance and Cleaning issues or accounting/Service Charge issues. The complaints procedure will remain the same, and if not happy with the Hyde outcome, a resident can still approach the Ombudsman or if Service Charge related, the Leasehold Tribunal. ASB will continue to be dealt with by the ASB Team. Bulk refuse will be dealt with in the normal way through Customer Services.
- 4.11 It was asked if there will be any tracking in the future for information requests. The Homeownership Team and the project team are working together to launch good practice guidance and monitoring to make sure enquiries are better tracked in the future.
- 4.12 Some roles will be office based and some will be patch based, with the ability to deploy a team member to complete face to face tasks, such as serving notice or a tenancy visit. Tenancy audits and responding to tenancy fraud will still be carried out.
- 4.13 There will be a balance between formally recorded detailed inspections and less formal check-ups on progress. Frequency of inspections will depend on how complex a scheme is and the level of risk. Staff will also need to balance inspection work with managing any complex incidents, e.g. a flood affecting a number of homes.

- 4.14 Patches will be structured differently accounting for geography, sheltered and supported, complex service charges and the size will be dependent on the need of the patches.
- 4.15 CHOP agreed that this sounded like a better structure, but it was noted that we will need to help customers to understand the new roles.

5 Service Charge Project Update

- 5.1 Auditors have now been out to look at the systems side of the Service Charge project. No issues were raised at the time. It was reiterated that there are three elements to the Service Charge project, and the system update is one.
- 5.2 Hyde now has a new Service Charge Team staff structure and the team will be fully staffed by mid-May as two more service charge coordinators are to be recruited. The team has now moved back into patch based working due to their full staff compliment.
- 5.4 The service charge reconciliation for 15/16 has now been completed and sent out to the 52 areas that had been delayed due to high variance or the fact that a managing agent was involved. It was noted however by members that service charge reconciliation has not been received in Peckham and had only been received in New Cross last week. It was asked if the date of posting and on the letter could be provided as they should have been received weeks ago. It was also asked if other residents could be asked if they had received theirs. **ACTION**
- 5.5 The Service Charge Coordinators will be looking after every element on their patches, including complaints, all correspondence an enquiries and service charge adjustments. There is currently a backlog of queries and complaints. An example was given of smarter working when it had been identified early that 20 residents from the same block in Minster had sent in the same letter, and all needed the same response.
- 5.6 The “Text Anywhere” service is now being used by the Service Charge Team and the hope is that the staff member dealing with the query and when the resident can expect a response will be sent much quicker in future.
- 5.7 The patch based approach was launched on 2 May. The reconciliation for 16/17 started on Friday and will be delivered before October 2017. There will also be a new focus on accuracy; as if the service charges are not accurate the coordinators will have a lot of complaints and queries to deal with at a later date. The new way of working is to try and give the coordinators more accountability and responsibility. The team commitment is that there will be no Section 20Bs in future. The team is building a functional plan on what the expectations are and when things will be completed. The spreadsheets will be individual moving forward.
- 5.8 Each person and the patch list for each coordinator to be posted on the OAK. **ACTION.** The coordinators will go out, look at the sites and meet the residents to try and improve their local knowledge.
- 5.9 The Sinking Fund project is still on going and is due to be completed in September 2017. We will then know where the underspends are. The processes and policy are currently in development and once complete, CHOP will be able to comment on. Through all of the Stock Transfers that Hyde have inherited and the reviews of those on an ‘as and when’ basis, the sinking funds have been slightly ad-hoc. Stock investment surveys were confirmed to have been carried out across all of Hyde

properties. Legislation states that the landlord has to set a reasonable sinking fund, but some specific lines, i.e. white goods, are historic and may not be relevant to the property now. Now the major and cyclical works are demand led. This is another reason why the sinking funds project is being undergone. It was confirmed that solicitors should be taking into account the amount in the sinking fund when selling and valuing a property and that this information is included in the Hyde presale pack. The sinking fund is attached to the property not the person. An update on the sinking funds project was requested as an agenda item in July. **ACTION**

- 5.10 Service Charge complaints were discussed and it was confirmed that there is still a lead Complaints Officer in Service Charges but they can't investigate all of the complaints themselves. They have been managing 84 backlogged complaints and now 67 have been resolved. Any complaints that have come in since April have been dealt with in the 10 day timescale by the Service Charge Coordinators. Complaints and information from local areas will be collated in the scheme documents, as talked about earlier in the Look Again project update.
- 5.11 In the future, if an individual change has been made to a resident's service charge; all other affected residents in the block/scheme will have the adjustments made as part of their reconciliation.
- 5.12 Action plans, including meetings, are being put in place for certain areas with complex service charge issues, so that things aren't being missed and the on-going issues are being addressed. Northside and Kennington actions plans are in place already.
- 5.13 Self-serve was discussed and Camden Council was given as an example of best practice. Self-serve at Hyde is on hold at the moment while the Service Charge system is completed. There is no current date for the completion of the Service Charge project as there have been delays that were unforeseen. The estimates were generated from the old spreadsheets and it is currently unknown if the actuals at the end of 2017 will be taken out of the spreadsheets or the new system.
- 5.14 The surplus and deficit report is now being scrutinised by the Service Charge Specialist. He and his team of accountants will be looking at the specifics of this report moving forward.

6 Communication Plan for Service Charges and the website

- 6.1 The Service Charge Team will be speaking to the Communications Team in the near future about what information would be best to advertise and publicise on the website. The team would like CHOP members' views on this and suggestions.
- 6.2 A suggestion was to post an organisation chart or team chart for the relevant areas to homeowners, i.e. who do I direct my query to? It was identified, however, that some people may bypass customer services and go directly to another member of staff, which could cause a disproportionate amount of work for a particular member of staff. It was suggested that names are not included but roles and a description of the roles. **ACTION**
- 6.3 A clear message and updates about the Service Charge project and specifically an update on the system. However this information needs to be relevant and easy to understand for all residents. **ACTION**
- 6.4 The Service Charge enquiry form goes directly into the Service Charge Team. It was suggested that an addition could be, if you are unhappy with the response, who do you go to and perhaps link to the complaints process. **ACTION**

- 6.5 A suggestion was made to add on the website the 'points of pain', i.e. the areas that homeowners may need information about identified from the number of complaints or enquiries. An example was given of the new grounds maintenance and cleaning contracts, which has led to an increase in service charges (in some areas) and so needs more information on the website to explain this. More suggestions were given of sinking funds, the Hyde management fee and processes for enquiries and complaints. **ACTION**
- 6.6 It was asked if a graphic of the service charge cycle could be included on the website, as would help customers understand when to expect estimates, actuals and budget. **ACTION**
- 6.7 It was also asked what would CHOP like to see on Social Media and whether they felt this was worthwhile for customers. Things could be posted like "reconciliation is 50% done for 16/17" or "estimates will be posted in the next few weeks". This would be alongside updates on the OAK.
- 6.8 It was suggested to look at best practice from other organisations in the use of social media in Service Charges and Home Ownership. **ACTION**
- 6.9 Templates and booklets may also need to be revisited by CHOP again maybe in July, if they felt it was needed.
- 6.10 There will be a post on the OAK to continue this discussion and to ask for suggestions from the wider homeowner audience. **ACTION**
- 7 Update on new pilots; loft disposals, lease extensions and fast track services**
- 7.1 It was requested by the Chair if this agenda item could be discussed further on the OAK. **ACTION**
- 8. AOB**
- 8.1 No AOB

Meeting closed at 8.25pm